

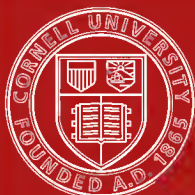


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PHASES OF DICKENS



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CHARLES DICKENS

ÆT. 55

PHASES OF DICKENS

*THE MAN, HIS MESSAGE,
AND HIS MISSION*

BY

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TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE
DICKENS FELLOWSHIP
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF THEIR
MANY TOKENS OF KINDNESS.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THESE chapters consist in the main of addresses which I have had the privilege of reading at meetings of the Dickens Fellowship in various parts of the country. This fact explains, and will, I hope, excuse if necessary, their somewhat rhetorical character, and a few unavoidable repetitions where the subjects overlap.

In preparing the papers I had in view a series of illustrations of the scope and purpose of Dickens as novelist and essayist, and as a teacher with a moral gospel enforced as much in the story as in the set sermon. Of what there is to say of Dickens little has by now been left unsaid, nor are his works in need of exposition, for his message is explicit and unmistakable. But it cannot be wholly profitless to take a survey of his complete design, and to show how, from the most elaborate of his novels to the shortest of his

journalistic articles, he was consistently carrying out a great campaign.

He was the censor of folly, the exposé of abuse, the advocate of reform, the guide to an uplifted and regenerated state. He was in revolt. The eighteenth-century traditions were abhorrent to him, and the early nineteenth-century customs left him dissatisfied. He was eager to be rid of the past; he was impatient with the present; he was on fire to usher in a new era of improved opportunity and of increased happiness for his fellow-men. His self-assigned task was to break down barriers to progress and to point the way to the goal. I have sought to portray this man, eliciting him from his books and not from biographies.

I appreciate Dickens the entertainer, who draws us around him by the wizard-spell of his stories; Dickens the necromancer, who leads us into the realm of enchantment through fairy gateways yielding to the magic touch; Dickens the familiar friend, who wins our smiles and compels our tears. But it is not with this Dickens I deal, though some of his characteristics are examined and the sources of his power traced. Dickens as an

Influence—as a warrior against evil, as a champion of good, as a guide to the ideal : it is he whose Phases are marked, that his Mission may be comprehended and his Message absorbed.

June 1911.

INTRODUCTION

DICKENS : THE MAN, THE WRITER, THE
CRUSADER

THESE pages are prepared as the centenary of the birth of Charles Dickens draws near. Forster has left us a classic biography which, so far as the main circumstances in the novelist's career are concerned, renders any further formal record supererogatory; but the works of Dickens are a mine, rich, if not inexhaustible, with their wealth of delight and suggestion. I cannot claim by study or research to achieve discovery of rare, unknown, or unsuspected treasure. My purpose in these pages is simply to bring anew into the light some aspects of the man of genius and some phases of his character, and to reassert the nature of his mission and the significance of his message. I undertake the task in a spirit of love and reverence, though, I trust, not of blind adulation, believing as I do that the nation is under a deeper debt to Charles Dickens than it often realizes. He is usually regarded as the supreme type of

literary entertainer, as one who commands our laughter and our tears, as a master-craftsman in the delineation of character, as one who holds us irresistibly by his spell when he weaves a plot and unfolds a theme. This is to give him high rank. But it is not his entire due.

Novelist and
Knight-
errant.

As we yield to his charm, is it not possible that we forget, or deliberately ignore, the underlying ethics, failing to perceive that his story may be a parable, his romance a gospel? "Dickens is writing London tracts," said Emerson, in one of those illuminating phrases which disclosed in a flash the inner truth of things; and whilst I do not wish to overstress the moral in his novels, I shall attempt to show that Dickens who enchains our interest and exercises his power over our emotions, is teacher, critic, and guide. He bids us look into our own hearts searchingly; he shows us evils to be expelled; he sets before us ideals. Scarcely one book, scarcely a single sketch which came from the untiring hand, which had not its special appeal, its enunciation of moral truth, its rebuke of some besetting sin in the individual or the race, its subtle or rousing call to man's better nature.

He was by temperament a crusader who, without unduly obtruding his missionary or religious aim, engaged none the less in as holy a war as the Knight Templar who went forth under the emblem of the Cross "to break the heathen and uphold the Christ."

He may have had no definite creed. He certainly had little tolerance of sects. Cant he abhorred, and the unctuous hypocrite he scourged unceasingly. But his nature was permeated with religious feeling, so pure that he revolted from taint, so true that he detested the false. No iconoclast demolished more idols; no Juvenal lashed with more pitiless scorn injustice, imposture, tyranny, and wrong, whether in the churches or the community, whether in the institution or the individual, whether in a hard Gradgrind doctrine of soul-destroying materialism, or in a cumbrous Chancery Court system, or in a Government Circumlocution Department, or in a perverted Bumbledom with its bungling and malicious maladministration, or in the dealings of man with man. In so odious a light did he expose crying iniquities, practised in private, established by statute, fostered by officials, or encouraged by custom,

The foes
assailed.

that he made those iniquities intolerable, converted their very names into bywords of reproach, and not infrequently compelled, by his keen ridicule or stern denunciation, their remedy or abolition. This is Dickens the campaigner, the social reformer on a great scale, on a high plane; the novelist who was the uncompromising and exacting critic; the humorist who was the censor; the dealer in romance who was warring against sad and bad realities; the dreamer who was using his dream—fantasies to stir men's consciences; the humanitarian who laboured to uplift his fellows to the higher goal.

The Spur to
Action.

The day on which such a man was given to the world is therefore rubricated in the Calendar and becomes a notable anniversary. On the 7th of February, 1812, a son was born to a clerk in the Navy Pay Office in Landport, a suburb of Portsmouth. When little beyond infancy the boy was removed to London, and long before he entered his teens he had experienced many of those pangs of body and racks of mind which are described so acutely in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. For the Landport lad was he who penned romances into which

so much autobiography was interwoven; he who could so poignantly describe the hopes and fears of childhood; he who drew drab pictures of dingy homes and shabby-genteel suburbs; he who from ineffaceable remembrances was enabled to tell of poverty-stricken and heart-sore youth, and of the struggles of those whose direst foes are "low birth and iron fortune." Dickens could not forget the rock from which he was hewn. Out of his personal experiences was born his intense sympathy with sufferers, together with his passion for reform. He had knowledge of the Nobodies and the Bigwigs, the unprivileged masses and the pampered classes; he became a hater of injustice and abuse, and the advocate of fair play, unhampered progress, essential change. Primarily he was a lover of his fellow-man. For nearly a century the influence of that lowly born Landport lad who "looked into his own heart, and wrote," has been potently exerted, appreciably felt.

With his attributes and capacity Dickens was rendered a man of destiny. His objective was perfectly clear, and his pronouncements are decisive. The honest

A better
England.

man had an honest and exalted purpose, and that purpose was so universal that it is purged of every trace of self-interest. He was a moulder of national character, a regenerator of his race, a reformer of his times. An intense patriot, he was dissatisfied with the England in which he was born and with the age in which he lived. He formulated an ideal which was neither very popular nor very acceptable when he first presented it to the gaze. He was at war with many bad old fashions and corrupt traditions; he was opposed to ultra-conservatism and insularity. The dragon of vicious manners and loathly precedent lay in the reformer's path. Dickens set himself a colossal task in trying to realize his dream of another England—an England brighter and cheerier, with men of real worth and dignity, with women of real charm and sincerity, with rulers of real humanity;—another England, with closer union between rich and poor, with fewer social divisions and sectional differences;—another England, ready to profit and learn even from the contemned foreigner, to widen its sympathies, to exterminate its animus;—another England, with politics free from

charlatanism, and religion cleansed of hypocrisy;—another England, with fewer workhouses and slums, and more schools and recreation halls;—another England, in which humbug should not be pampered, crime should be less prevalent, and brotherly feeling more manifest. This was the England of Charles Dickens's vision, the England of his determined aim.

Dickens was a Victorian in conflict with his age. Rightly or wrongly he believed it was an age of severities and shams. He was in rebellion, and his own good fortune never made him waver or change, become lethargic, or sheathe his sword. His democratic spirit could not brook class distinctions and conditions of privilege; and surviving forms of thraldom aroused his wrath. The typical home of the self-satisfied well-to-do citizen, with its heavy and stuffy furniture, its horse-hair chairs, its pot-bellied tables, and its unattractive decorations, excited his derision and his condemnation because he believed it was indicative of dulled mentality. He makes us feel the chill and depression of the Podsnap and Dombey establishments, the blight of Mrs. Clennam's rooms, and the

Conflict with
the Times.

sickliness of the Witterlys' vapid pretentiousness.

The Pretentious Period.

But perhaps nothing is more scathing in its satire than the description of the shabby gentility and the unconscious vulgarity of those petty suburban snobs, the Kenwigses, who were looked upon as persons of consideration because they occupied "the whole of the first floor, comprising a suite of two rooms," because the little girls went twice a week to a dancing school, and because Mrs. Kenwigs was "of a very genteel family, having an uncle who collected the water-rate." The exquisite humour of it all—the pathos of it, too! Dickens knew the soul-destroying influence of such things, and he heartily hated that formal, gloomy, "genteel" Victorian period, which seemed to provide so favourable an atmosphere for squalid make-believe, and despairing drudgery, and hard commercialism, and kill-joy customs. But what romance could there be in an age of stove-pipe hats, crinolines, braided coats, gingham umbrellas, and sprouting side-whiskers? Dickens, who was always on the side of the fairies, and who pleaded for indulgence in fancy as against

the adhesion to fact, saw around him a grim-visaged people fettered to utilitarianism, affrighted at the thought of innocent freedom and frivolity, and solemnly denouncing a bright colour, a pretty ornament, a dainty device, as—"French!"

His problem was how to induce or compel the miracle of change and amendment to be wrought. Sheer genius led him to resolve The Rescue on making the foolish laugh at their own follies. For those who could not be tickled with a straw there remained the lash. But he preferred the lighter weapon, the gentler means; and he had the prescience to realize that what is ridiculed out of existence does not revive, whereas force may only lead to concealment, not to extinction. Dickens, then, allows his reforming power mainly to be displayed in satire. Ever and anon he denounces, in terms that are terrible and deadly; when he flagellates a delinquent he is unsparing; but if we review for a moment his horde of rogues and hypocrites we shall see that he holds most of them up to a wholesome contempt, and makes them writhe under the scorn that completes their humiliation.

It has been quite truly said that Dickens

Warrior not
Statesman.

had not always a clear and specific idea as to what form improvements should take. He pointed out the disease and its dangers, and it was for others to prescribe the cure. He knew what our hideously wrong and barbaric treatment of charity boys and work-house waifs led to; he knew that over-zeal for the Tockahoopoo Indians led to neglect of Poor Jo at home; he knew the pernicious influence of Bumble, and Squeers, and Mrs. Gamp, and sleepy Lord Chancellors for ever adjourning cases and heaping up costs in the Chancery Court. He proposed to laugh some out of existence, and to drive others to their doom, and he was not called upon, having done that, to revise the Poor Laws, or establish model seminaries, or reorganize the legal system and create new Courts of Equity. The nation was to see to the remedy when Dickens had exposed the malady. It was to be taught, not by scolding and exhortation, but by life-like examples. It was to understand that Mrs. Gamp was an evil to be swept away as much as the Circumlocution Office, and that the real enemies of England were Mr. Podsnap, who said "All is well," Gradgrind and Bounderby, who

would have crushed down the aggrieved instead of crushing out the grievance, and the Barnacle tribe, who would prevent reform by the exercise of every art of evasion.

Dickens tried to make John Bull an active legislator; he awakened him to facts; he taught him that things might be better at home. That was a marvel of accomplishment when we consider what an obstinate old gentleman John Bull can be, blindly convinced that all is for the best in this best possible island in the best possible world. An old gentleman who still tolerates the railway sandwich and the railway cup of tea at railway prices, served out by undying specimens of Mugby Junction waitresses, is not one to be easily moved to reform when vaster issues are at stake. Dickens must have been possessed of the faith that would move mountains when he set himself this task. But he chose his weapon with unerring skill, and used it with unmatched dexterity. Satire, raillery, ridicule, attained his end, and pierced the joints of John Bull's armour. He still winces if you call him Bumble; he shudders at a reference to Red Tape; he does not like allusions to Jarndyce v. Jarn-

dyce and "Wiglomeration"; and to call him Pecksniff is a libel.

Strokes for Truth. Dickens's work was only half accomplished by the exposure of the false. He had to supply examples of the true. This part of the work he unhesitatingly undertook. The portraits are indelibly limned, and are so precious, attractive, and delightful that they are accepted as models. His novels are a gallery of living pictures conveying the desired lessons. Whilst hypocrisy is made hateful, cruelty revolting, prejudice ridiculous, and villainy abhorrent, they stand out in dark contrast with the depicted embodiments of gentleness, charity, helpfulness, large-heartedness, tolerance, and human service. It is for men to look and choose.

So was Dickens's influence borne upon the race. He gave the impetus to reform; he fashioned his ideals of manhood and womanhood; he excited antagonism to imposture in every form and guise; he taught fraternity; he aroused a desire for betterment and radical change. He made that Other England possible, an England still awaiting the perfecting touch, but far-travelled from that past which had filled him with apprehension and alarm.

PART I
THE LITERARY PHASES

CHAPTER THE FIRST

HIS CHARACTERISTICS

THE personality of Charles Dickens is a factor which counts for much. There were flaws in his great character; there were defects in his genius. With all his display of power there were strange lapses and weaknesses. But his mistakes were not fatal, and our enthusiasm is never quenched. Considering that throughout his life he was a campaigner it is little short of marvellous that he incurred no reverses; he knew nothing of retreat or failure. The victory is all the more wondrous when we remember his handicaps, his occasional errors, and his limited equipment.

The chronicle of Dickens's upward career as his genius was manifested, of his rapid rise to fame, and of his permanent popular-

4 Phases of Dickens

ity, need not detain us. But his characteristics must be examined if we are to understand the potentiality of his mission and the effectiveness of his teachings. No English author (I will not extend the range) has come so close to the hearts of the people as Charles Dickens. Greater than he there have been; genius far ampler is found among our poets and philosophers; the lordliest intellects tower far above his, and we should not dare to rank him with the sovereigns of the literary domain. But the enthroned and sceptred masters are aloof and remote, and do not abide our question; Dickens is always near and intimate. He is the friend speaking direct, needing no intermediary, requiring no interpreter; we understand his words and are moved by his message; he has the power of appeal, and is a man—always a Man—in contact with his brother-man. He seems in our midst, and is so bound to us in sympathy that when we are wrought to tears we detect the glimmer of a tear in his own eyes, and when we are impelled to laughter we seem

**A People's
Champion.**

to catch the roll of his own happy laugh accompanying ours. There can be few other instances in authorship where so strong a personal sentiment is evoked, and where the correspondence between author and reader is so complete.

Had it ever been my fortune to see Dickens face to face, had it been my privilege to take his hand or hear his voice, I am certain that I should have glanced round to see if he were accompanied by that retinue of characters who troop through his region of romance. I cannot, and would not, dissociate the man from his works. In my visions he is surrounded by his characters. His sketches of boyhood and manhood flash upon us as self-revelations. He was Copperfield, he was Pip, he was little Paul Dombey in mind, no matter who stood for the original portrait; it was he who listened to the gruesome legends of Captain Murderer; he was the miserable scholar at the mysterious school, and likewise the victim at Mr. Creakle's; he was the playfellow of Traddles

Human
Kinship

and Herbert Pocket; he was the gallant hero of the *Holiday Romance*; and he was the boy at Dullborough. The conviction is impressed upon us, and there is no need to go to his biography for confirmation.

Assuredly and more admittedly he was the lonely man at the unfashionable watering-place, and the traveller in France who knew Monsieur the Englishman and saw the P. Salcy family; he was the patient gentleman who listened to Mrs. Lirriper and Doctor Marigold, and who knew Barbox Brothers and Old Humphrey, and who visited Satis House, Bleak House, the Nuns' House, and who knew every corner of Cloisterham, Bath, and Blunderstone; it was he who slept at Ipswich, and dreamt at Salisbury, and walked about Coketown, and threaded his way through the labyrinth of London—who, in short, was part of all he told and wrote. This is an article of faith, and by no casuistry or specious argument, no, not even by the most powerful logic, can it be proved a heresy. For it is the irresistible Dickens charm, the

proof of a personality which is dominating and overpowering. That personality abides in every book. It sends forth a vitality unimpaired and undiminished by time.

To few men has the power been so completely given to write by instinct as it was given to Dickens. In common phrase, things "came" to him, apparently unsought. Truth revealed itself, and words were ready. Just as he is reputed to have been able to walk along a street and know its every feature, so he seems to have scrutinized men in a flash, and perceived the workings of their mind by intuition. His work was not labour; had it been, he could not have done one-half. Everything was spontaneous; his pen touched the paper and the phrases flowed. Humour and pathos were summoned at will; the ordinary was transformed into romance; he rubbed the magic lamp and the genii appeared. There is no explaining it—the marvel simply occurs. It extends to the variety of his subjects, handled with skill which seldom fails. The casual letters

The Untiring
Hand.

8 Phases of Dickens

thrown off in heat to a friend have the same originality and fertility as the chapters in a book. Essays, speeches, comments, sketches, came from the bountiful mind with facility. He was journalist, historian, orator; he was dramatist and biographer; he was reader and actor; he was letter-writer, book-reviewer, reviser, editor; he was interviewer and counsellor; he was traveller. Nature's mechanism, running smoothly enough, was soon overstrained, and he died—working—at fifty-six. There was a sudden snap and the wheels stopped. He could not even make a will without converting it into literature and enforcing favourite doctrines. There had been no cessation of effort since the day that he had tremblingly dropped his first sketch into the post and awakened to find Boz famous. Every event was to be turned to account, every experience to be recorded—a walk, a railway journey, a visit to a friend, the sight of a ship, a peep into the theatre, as well as all the vaster things of life. His rule was—no leisure, no intervals. He had a

morbid dread of indolence and a frantic fear of interruption.¹

He wrote too much, and his tireless energy, combined with an almost overweening satisfaction with his own efforts, led him Relapse in his later works to become diffuse. It might be said that he felt a greater zest in traversing, say, the arid tracts of *Little Dorrit* and *Dombey and Son*, than he could inspire in his toiling and wearied readers. He crammed up the spaces in his working-days with a host of miscellanea which—as in his *Detective Tales*—was scarcely worth penning or printing. Then death came with a crash. It was the inexorable penalty which

¹ To his sister he wrote (April 3, 1855), "I hold my inventive capacity on the stern condition that it must master my whole life, often have complete possession of me, make its own demands upon me, and sometimes for months together put everything else away from me. If I had not known long ago that my place could never be held unless I were at any moment ready to devote myself to it entirely, I should have dropped out of it very soon. . . . There are penalties for writing books. Whoever is devoted to an art must be content to deliver himself wholly up to it, and to find his recompense in it."

Nature exacts from the spendthrift. He died, pen in hand, the unfinished manuscript before him, the eager invention spurred to the last. I wish he had written less and lived longer. I believe, too, that had the mania for ceaseless exertion not possessed him he would in his last years have reached a greater height and plumbed a greater depth. The discursiveness might have crystallized into a gem-like concreteness; the paragraph might have been polished into an epigram; the mad-cap humour might have been refined into wit. For Dickens was not a witty man. He was radiant and cheerful, but there was no subtle or jewel-like brilliance in his mirth.

With the charge of "exaggeration" I do not agree—so far from that, I protest against it. Dickens did not exceed the legitimate licence of every artist striving to convey a truthful effect and a full realization of it. He chose extreme cases, but he was justified, and they were none the less correct because they were isolated. He used fact in romance, and imparted romance to

"Exaggeration."

fact, and he was violating no law. He was insistent upon his points, but such insistence is proof only of sincerity, not of exaggeration. He himself met the specious indictment boldly, even indignantly, and declared that he dealt only with truth—truth certainly as he perceived it, truth as it impressed him, not necessarily truth as others saw it.

“If I might offer any apology for so exaggerated a fiction as the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office,” he wrote in his Preface to *Little Dorrit*, “I would seek it in the common experience of an Englishman, without presuming to mention the unimportant fact of my having done violence to good manners in the days of a Russian war, and of a Court of Inquiry at Chelsea.” He defended also his “extravagant conception” of Mr. Merdle, magnate and forger, by referring to certain events in the Railroad Share epoch; and he pleaded in extenuation of “the preposterous fancy” that a bad design sometimes claims to be good, that he had before him the evidence of the directors of

a Royal British Bank. But despairing of convincing his accusers, he concluded with a satirical mock-acceptance of the assurance (on good authority) that nothing like these things and persons "had ever been known in the land."

"I have never touched a character precisely from the life," he remarked in his Preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit*, "but some counterpart of that character has incredulously asked me: 'Now really, did I ever really, see one like it?'" He asseverated the fidelity of his Pecksniffs; he declared his Court of Chancery to be "substantially true and within the truth"; and he reminded his readers that the record of the Watertoast Association was a literal paraphrase from the American Press. The seeming exaggeration often arises from intense concentration. He makes an oddity so prominent that a man may seem all oddity, without relief.¹

¹ "The essential facts and the truth of Dickens's writings," wrote Ruskin, "have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons, merely because he pre-

He believed in repetitions, and they were not vain. All men who have convictions and who believe in their own message repeat themselves, from Cato with his eternal "Carthaginem esse delendam" to Arnold with his "sweetness and light." It is, moreover, an excellent principle. As an eminent critic has said, you must tell a judge twice and a jury thrice what you want them to understand; and as for the middle-class public, you must "hammer into them remorselessly and with unblushing iteration." Dickens was dealing mainly with the middle class, and he hammered away like a pedagogue with a dull pupil. He was not content to mention once Mrs. Merdle's chest or Mrs. Sparsit's nose: he dinned the facts into the brain. It was the same when he discussed Red Tape a dozen times, or Patents, or

The Virtue of
Insistency.

sents his truth with some colour of caricature. The caricature, though often gross, is never mistaken. Allow for manners, and the things he tells are true. Let us not lose the use of Dickens's wit and insight because he chooses to speak in a circle of stage fire."

Bumbledom, or the Magistracy. The result is that we never forget. Another result is that these things loom so large that we are ready to cry—"Exaggeration." It was only insistence and persistence. It was courage, it was faith in himself, it was the fervour that brings about conversion.

His love of travel made him cosmopolitan and a man of broad sympathies. We trace back to this his readiness to profit from the "foreigner," and to impress upon his fellow-countrymen the need for greater tolerance and catholicity. Such narrowness as he himself had he reserved for lawyers and foreign missionaries. Here, again, he was influenced and prejudiced by personal considerations. But turn where we will personality intrudes itself. Dickens seldom sat down to write romance or essay without having Dickens for a theme.

It was good for the world that he had been discontented with his lot. "Most of us come from Dullborough who come from a country town," he wrote; and on another occasion he

"Father to the Man."

gloomily confessed how "miserable a thing it was to feel ashamed of home." He brooded continually and grieved inwardly over the dismal and depressing conditions of his youth. Out of self-pity came acute sympathy for all dwellers in the house of poverty and pain. The pathos of his own young life gave to Dickens an almost passionate interest in lowly-born children. The tragedy of their youth had been the possible tragedy of his own, and he had walked with aching heart through his own valley of shadow, hemmed in by frowning obstacles only to be overcome by heroic perseverance; he had known the death-in-life of hopelessness, penury, and humiliation; the fears of the boy had never ceased to be haunting spectres to the man;—and thus the childish memories of his romances are recallings of his own unhappiness, the phantoms of dead days of dread. He knew the heart of the child, because of the secrets which his own heart stored.

“There was once a child, and he strolled about a good deal, and thought of a number of things. He had a sister, who was a child too, and his constant companion. These two used to wonder all day long. They wondered at the beauty of the flowers; they wondered at the height and blueness of the sky; they wondered at the depth of the bright water; they wondered at the goodness and the power of God who made the lovely world. . . . There was one clear shining star that used to come out in the sky before the rest . . . and they used to say, ‘God bless the star!’”

But he was born with hope and ambition. Despite the squalor and struggle of his youth, he had what he called his “inheritance.” “A shining Castle (in the air) with young Love looking out of window, perfect contentment and repose of spirit standing with ethereal aspect in the porch, visions surrounding it by night and day with an atmosphere of pure gold.” Looking back in his last years he recalled that this legacy, “never squandered,” came to him when he was nineteen. It was indeed rich and

glorious, but if it supplied him with romance it brought him tragedy also. The tragedy is of disillusion. It courses like a darkening stream through many a story he told. Its beginning may be traced in the episodes of *Copperfield* and *Miss Larkins*, *John Chivery* and *Little Dorrit*; it is seen in its pathos in *Dora Spenlow*; it glowers in the furious tumult of *Bradley Headstone* during the despairing pursuit of *Lizzie Hexam*, and it turns to bitterness in scorn for *Flora Finching*. Dickens was but telling again and again, with ridicule or with wrath, the tale of his infatuation for *Maria Beadnall*, his hopelessness, his frenzy, and his final revulsion from a shattered idol. As in mediæval pictures one face starts forth recognizably, now as angel and now as fiend, now tenderly limned and now ruthlessly mocked, so in Dickens's novels there is one discernible image which alternately bewitches and repels. It is sometimes *Dora*, sometimes *Flora*; but the original is the same, and it is that "young Love" who dwelt in the

“shining Castle” of his early vision—the Castle in the air.

He conceived essays and converted them into novels; he had inspirations for sermons, and he spoke them in the form of illustrative drama. The Dickensian homily becomes a parable; the tract expands into an epic, with a hundred characters, amusing or pathetic, pointing the moral, enforcing and enunciating the truth. There are all the splendour, all the enchantment, all the interchanging light and shadow of the fairy-tale, but the basis is a tract none the less. You can see the subject, set out in one black line, and note the transformation in golden hues. “Selfishness” changes by magic into *Martin Chuzzlewit*; “The Danger of Utilitarianism” into *Hard Times*; “Warped Purpose” into *Bleak House*; “Self-Abnegation” into *Little Dorrit*; and “Perverted Nature” into *Dombey and Son*. The novels of Dickens are glorified allegory. It was no accident. Dickens was wholly conscious of the fact, and designed it. Unlike modern authors he

A moral
Teacher.

was not afraid to talk of his "purpose." In essay, letter, and preface he emphasized it, sometimes in his anxiety gilding refined gold or piling Pelion on Ossa. We do him injustice, detract from his greatness, and set him in a wrong place, if we merely call him novelist. As well call Dante a dreamer or Rabelais a raconteur.

I lament his early death, yet I do not account him unhappy in his end. He had quite finished his main task, and had fulfilled his noble mission; his place had been secured; his fame was unquestioned. Had his years been prolonged he would inevitably have continued his work, but already the hand was faltering, though he knew it not. His labours were tinged with hysteria, and his zenith was passed. I think, too, that he craved for the rest which he denied himself, and that he had premonitions of the approaching end. In his lonely hours he must have felt the solemnity of Old Humphrey's emotions, and the words of the man about to pass in peace must have surged from his own heart :

The Happy
Warrior.

“Recollections of the past and visions of the present come to bear me company; the meanest man to whom I have ever given alms appears, to add his mite of peace and comfort to my stock; and whenever the fire within me shall grow cold, to light my path upon this earth no more, I pray that it may be at such an hour as this, and when I love the world as well as I do now.” And I like to think, idle as it may be, that when the last moment came, when the Angel with the Sword stood by his side, the prophecy of his own words was fulfilled, and “he cried, as he had cried so long ago: ‘I see the star! My age is falling from me like a garment, and I move towards the star as a child.’”

“And the star was shining; and it shines upon his grave.”

CHAPTER THE SECOND

HIS CRAFTSMANSHIP

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE declared that *Great Expectations* was the second best work of Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* coming first. That is an opinion with which I should not wholly agree, but it is one I would not violently contest. *Great Expectations* is probably his best "story." The idea is consistently worked out with regularity, steadiness, and fixity of purpose. There are no variations, no side-issues, no changes of mind,¹ no ramblings from the central point. The story is clear and decisive; its secret is well held and "sprung" at the psychological moment. As for characterization, it is seen at its highest, and it loses nothing by being less ornate and more of a cameo-type than in many of the longer

¹ The last chapter must be excluded from consideration, as it was no part of the original design.

volumes. The dramatic element is powerful throughout. Poignancy and pathos are relieved by delicious humour; the shadows by refreshing rays and welcome flashes. In the story appear the noblest of nature's gentlemen and the most arrant of impostors; and the sombre fabric of convict life is interwoven with the weird fantasy of Miss Havisham. One of the most adroitly limned of legal characters is discovered in Mr. Jaggers, and one of the most subtle of the strange fellows nature frames is found in his clerk, Wemmick. Gargery is a transcendent type of honest manhood, noble in all its native strength and unpolished grandeur. These ingredients go to the composition of a work that fully merits the title of greatness. It is also one of the novels with a most marked humanitarian purpose. The chapters on convict life are a treatise on a special theme.

Mrs. Browning, in a letter to Richard Hengist Horne, suggested that Dickens's "tragic saliences in *Oliver Twist* should be

compared with passages in Victor Hugo's *Trois Jours d'un Condamné*. She spoke of the influence upon his mind, "most manifest and undeniable," of the French school of imaginative literature. To myself this suggestion has deep significance.

The Victor
Hugo Influ-
ence.

It would have been little short of wonderful if Dickens had wholly escaped the charge of plagiarism, or, at least, of "influence." But in spite of his large literary output it was only on rare occasions that he found his originality of invention open to question. It was thought that Wills's *Dead Heart* supplied him with the main idea of self-sacrifice for *A Tale of Two Cities*.¹ I think he found the plot of a little story in Poe's *Black Cat* and another in Leigh Hunt's *Cottage*. But the strangest of literary coincidences is, to me, that which is connected with *Great Expectations* and Victor Hugo's *Les Miser-*

¹ Compare the conclusion with Lytton's *Zanoni*. The heroine, Viola, is condemned to death during the Reign of Terror, and Zanoni, her lover, takes her place, and is "purified by sacrifice." *Zanoni* was published in 1842; *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1859.

ables. Both works have the same theme, the hunted-down convict who, once condemned, is ever afterwards regarded by the Law as its prey. Dickens published the story of Magwitch in 1861; Hugo was writing the story of Jean Valjean in the same year, and it was published in 1862. Novels about convict life were at this period in fashion, and six years previously Charles Reade had created a sensation with *It's Never Too Late to Mend*. In all these cases the tone was sympathetic towards the condemned, and the plea was—Give a man a chance instead of spoiling his life and breaking his heart by merciless discipline and the grinding of inexorable and inhuman systems of repression. The parallel between Dickens and Hugo would not be so striking, however, if it were confined to this main idea. But it extends to details.

Magwitch and Valjean are brothers in suffering. Each is a wrongdoer whose hard nature is softened by a new human interest suddenly introduced into his life. Each reforms and enters upon a new career for the

The two
"hunted-
down"
Convicts.

sake of another person he desires to help (Magwitch, Pip; Valjean, Fantine). Each has unduly suffered for the past; each makes a fortune to be bestowed upon others; each is re-captured and doomed; each has a dogged enemy who helps blind and undiscerning Law. "I was sent for life," said Magwitch, when he had told Pip his story. "It's death to come back. I should of a certainty be hanged if took." "I was nineteen years in the galleys," said Jean Valjean. Parallels "Then I was sentenced for life. I am now in breach of ban." Each convict made full confession to the one he most loved and most desired to benefit; each one tried to keep the truth from the woman most tenderly regarded, Magwitch from his daughter Estella, and Valjean from his adopted child Cosette. Each of the lovers of these women (Pip and Marius) repudiates his benefactor for a time, but learns to honour as well as pity him.

There are likenesses between other characters in the two stories. Madame Thenardier who ill-used Cosette might be the sister of Mrs. Joe Gargery who ill-treated

Pip. The ever-forgiving, unresenting Joe Gargery has the same spirit of magnanimity as Bishop Myriel. Compeyson who hounded down Magwitch is of the very breed of Javert who hounded down Valjean. Marius, the hero, finds himself in dire need just as Pip finds himself in debt; and it is the scorned ex-convict who is the rescuer in each instance. Magwitch and Valjean aspired only for a peaceful home, and were capable of supreme acts of self-denial for the happiness of others. And each prisoner on his death-bed excites in us the same compassion, and leaves us impressed with the same lesson that the undeviating process of the Law is not just—the human element should have play. It was exactly this moral which Dickens strove to enforce once more when he related the experiences of Will Fern and the effect of cumulative sentences.

That Dickens was truly influenced by the French school we have every right to believe, although it is unlikely that he consciously copied any contemporary author. He seems to shrink from indebtedness, and to be so

conscious of his own resources as to scorn reliance upon other people. Nor can it be disputed that, both in small things and great, he had almost limitless powers. He could lavish on comparative trifles a wealth which most authors would have deemed it advisable to reserve for their greatest efforts.

The true artist is scrupulous in minor details as well as in broad features, and nothing affords the Dickens student deeper Thoroughness. satisfaction than to note the conscientious care which he devoted to incidental matters. The Todgers chapters in *Martin Chuzzlewit* are quite casual, and the value of the episode is so slight that it might have been summed up in a paragraph. Dickens converted it into a miniature masterpiece, abounding in humour, and presenting to the gaze a series of unforgettable characters in a cheap boarding-house. The chapter, "In Denmark," which tells the story of Mr. Wopsle's experiences as Hamlet, is quite superfluous so far as the carrying-on of the plot of *Great Expectations* is concerned; but what a feast

it is, and who would have it omitted? Dickens revelled in such opportunities, and put forth his power to the full in utilizing them.

If this be true of episodes, how much more true it is when we come to persons. Here Dickens was prodigal. He was not content with names; he must have identities. If there were to be a crowd on his stage, it must be a crowd of defined individualities. The portraits might be mere cameos, but they had distinctness. They leave a clear impression though they may be seen but once. They are recognizable. Take the old seaman who saw Bella Wilfer married, the brisk waiter whom Arthur Clennam encountered on his return home, the footman at the house of Ruth Pinch's master, the vacuous young man who said "Esker" to the Frenchman at Mr. Podsnap's, David Copperfield's friend who started all his sentences by saying—"A man," and the waiter who ate David's pie and drank his beer. Not one of them named, yet each of them known and remembered.

Or, turn to some minor characters who just flit into a few pages, and then depart—but not like shadows: Mr. Cheggs and Sophy Wackles in *The Old Curiosity Shop*; Mr. Chick in *Dombey and Son*; “Coavinses” in *Bleak House*; “Mr. F.’s Aunt” in *Little Dorrit*; Boots and Buffer in *Our Mutual Friend*; Spottletoe and company in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; Mr. and Mrs. Hubble, to say nothing of Mr. Trabb the tailor in *Great Expectations*; “Mercury” in *Bleak House*; and that exquisitely limned non-entity, Mr. George Sampson, in *Our Mutual Friend*. It is an endless source of delight to seek in each case for the adept touch by which Dickens permits complete identification to take place. He enables us to visualize each person, unimportant and even mean though he be, and though his only act (as in the case of William Potkins) is to cough respectful comments to a windbag’s orations.

When he comes to men of business, with their trade-mark upon them, Dickens is equally happy. So far as men of the

Business and
Shoddy.

shoddier type go, he did not spare them good-humoured satire. We recall the undertaker who had a snuff-box shaped like a coffin as a delicate reminder of his business; we remember Mr. Sapsea with his auctioneering manner in private life; we remember Mr. and Mrs. Mould and their love of funeral topics. Perhaps the most diverting of all sketches of this description is that of the Tetterbys, but the list is so long and the choice so abundant, that each reader may be safely left to select his own favourites.

Translating
Gesture.

In depicting tradesmen Dickens frequently drew attention to their habit of "suing the action to the word" and unconsciously reproducing in private life the mannerisms of the shop. He had a special faculty not only for these descriptions but for applying to them a subtle and often a ludicrous significance. Poe aptly called it "translating the language of gesture, or action, or tone," and adduced salient examples from *Barnaby Rudge*. But every novel contains items for the catalogue, and so frequently does it occur that we come to expect that the raising of the eyebrows,

the motion of a hand, or a glance between two parties, will be followed by a quaint or cunning interpretation beginning—"As if to say."¹ That form of illustration which dullards adopt to aid the understanding of others equally dull, is ludicrously exhibited in Mr. Giles's play with a table-cloth when telling his story of Sikes's burglary—"Turning round in my bed, as it might be so" (here Mr. Giles turned round in his chair, and pulled the corner of the table-cloth over him to imitate bed-clothes) . . . "I turned down the clothes" (here Giles rolled back the table-cloth) . . . "I tossed off the clothes" (here Giles threw away the table-cloth) . . . "and groped down-stairs" (here he took two steps forward with his eyes shut).

But the very excellence and the surprising ingenuity of Dickens's translation of the language of gesture has led to one significant failure. He himself was dramatic enough, his stories were dramatic, his characters were dramatic; and yet no really

The Failure
in Drama.

¹ The most subtle series of illustrations will be found in *Our Mutual Friend* in the translation of the gestures of "The Analytical"—Veneering's melancholy retainer.

good and great drama of permanent value has ever yet been drawn from his books. Worse still, the staging of Dickens dramas has seldom been successful, and the acting—no matter how eminent the performers—never completely satisfying to those who thoroughly know their Dickens. This is largely due to the fact that it is impossible for actors, however gifted, to convey to an audience all that a wink, a smile, a motion of the hand, an uplifting of the eyebrows, was meant to convey in the Dickens sense. He could write it in words, and give it special significance, adroitness, whimsicality, or penetrating meaning; but either the actor must not attempt it at all, or, in attempting it, must run the risk of artificial exaggeration and laborious affectation. In all attempts to dramatize Dickens's works we experience a sense of disillusion, and so the vitality of the characters evaporates.

Errors of taste are a serious matter, few though they may be. I am not among those who condemn Dickens for depicting Leigh

Hunt as Harold Skimpole in view of the noble tribute, by way of explanation, which he afterwards paid to that sadly misunderstood genius; but I deplore the lapse in art which led Dickens, towards the close of *Bleak House* to import criminality into the child-like nature of the poet and idealist. He was ungracious in holding up to ridicule an estimable acquaintance only faintly disguised as Miss Mowcher; and there was needless acerbity in the ridicule of a woman he had once passionately loved, and of whom he made a public scorn as Flora Finching. As literary artist he outraged sentiment in the merciless victimizing of Bradley Headstone, whose only fault was to love too well, and whose only misfortune was to be one of the hated tribe of pedagogues; and I am by no means sure that Dickens can be justified in bidding us laugh at, rather than mourn for, Augustus Moddle, John Chivery, and Mr. Guppy. His judgment seems to be a little warped in these matters, and, with no set scheme in view (Moddle is obviously an

afterthought), he was led into inconsequence, extravagance, even cruelty.

Marred
masterpieces.

Sometimes Dickens did not even know exactly what to do with his characters. He lost grip of them. No story is more unsatisfying and even unreasonable than that of Pet Meagles and Harry Gowan in *Little Dorrit*. Dickens apparently halted between two opinions as to the fate of the delightful girl, and found the confusion inextricable when he decided that Clennam could not be her husband. A weak compromise resulted in sacrifice, and the episode ends unpleasantly. But this is only one glaring defect in a volume which is more or less chaotic. Blandois, entering and departing like a melodramatic villain, Mrs. Clennam environed with mystery, Jeremiah and Affery Flintwinch and "the Double," suggesting far more than is ever explained, are all involved in a plot comparable only for inconsecutiveness and incompleteness to Mr. Vincent Crummies's bewildering drama. If Poe had analyzed *Little Dorrit* as remorselessly as he analyzed

Barnaby Rudge we might almost have feared for Dickens's fame. But we are once more reminded of Dickens's essential weakness, or carelessness, in plot. Who can be satisfied with the patched-up "happy ending" of *Great Expectations*—that weak concession to Lytton's namby-pamby sentimentality? Estella is the most enigmatical of women and the most impossible of heroines, and her haphazard union with Pip leaves us entirely unconvinced that good sense has prevailed. Who, again, can reflect with entire satisfaction on the conclusion of *The Chimes*, which is practically a non-sequitur? Who can credit that Caleb Plummer's daughter could, with her sharpened instinct, ever have been deceived by Caleb's infantile pretensions? Who can disentangle the network of confusion in *No Thoroughfare* and believe in the series of amazing coincidences, recognitions, reunions, reappearances, chance encounters, and duplicated names? But Dickens was accustomed to count upon the absolute credulity of his readers. He de-

Defective
Plots.

scribed in detail the fate of Daniel Quilp, told how (unseen by any human eye) he fought for life in the water, and chronicled in detail his last (unspoken) thoughts. No one objects to an author's licence, but Dickens demands one beyond all reason.

Just as his etherealized heroes were too good, his melodramatic villains were too black. Carker and Quilp cease to be human; Monks is never quite real; Jonas Chuzzlewit is crude to savagery. At times we seem to get outside the rational world with such characters, and it is this fact which has so largely helped to create the unjust charge against Dickens of "exaggeration." The faults are exceptional, and ought not to prejudice the final verdict.

Dickens attempted to write ghost stories without any success; only one of them, *The*
The Occult. *Signalman's Story*, contains the slightest thrill. Apparently he deceived himself in thinking that he could deal with mysticism as distinct from mysteries. He prided himself so much upon a sane and normal mind that he was inclined to scoff at the super-

natural instead of reasoning about it. His articles on Spiritualism were written with all the dogmatism of the dunce, and much in the same mood as we might expect a mediæval monk to discuss the solar hypothesis. No doubt Dickens, had he lived in these days, would lightly dismiss Myers as a crank, would dub Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir William Crookes as monomaniacs, and would roundly declare Dr. Russel Wallace to be a fraud. In other words, Dickens was unable to adopt a fair and unprejudiced attitude towards those things he did not understand, but which, with characteristic self-confidence, he was convinced he had mastered. His excursions into the psychical domain cannot but be considered unfortunate, inasmuch as modern research shows that he himself incurred the ridicule which he sought to cast upon others. He certainly did no damage to the cause he assailed with such ill-directed blows.¹

I cannot say much in favour of the *Child's*

¹ See note at end of chapter, p. 44.

Futile or
Superfluous.

History of England. It is an easy-going record of facts from the time of the early Britons to the last of the Stuarts; and a few opinions, of no weight, are interspersed. There is far too much of "I believe that was right," and "I think the Stuarts were a public nuisance," to give the work a tone of dignity and authority; to gibe at a king as "His Sowship" throughout a long chapter, is not to display the calm and precision of a faithful chronicler; to emphasize small details, to dwell unduly on picturesque events, and to allow anecdotes to preponderate, show not only a lack of proportion, but reveal that the author's bias was to romance, not to history. However, the remarkable circumstance is that Dickens should have given himself the toil to produce any such formal work; but, since he did so, it is equally surprising that a *Geography for Beginners*, or a *Euclid made Easy*, did not occupy his further attention. Every allowance must be made for the fact that the *History* was intended only for children. But whenever I glance through the

chapters I am disposed to say of it, as Dr. Johnson said of a woman's preaching and a dog's standing on its hind legs—"It is not well done, but the wonder is that it should be done at all."

His other formal works—for so I regard them—have to be viewed from an entirely different standpoint. The *American Notes* are the records of a traveller, shrewd, penetrating, fearlessly just but not unkind. In the *Pictures from Italy* Dickens has given us some of his best descriptive work—delicate vignettes of old towns, bright landscapes, or hard and sharp etchings, as the subjects required. Read the account of dreary and melancholy Ferrara; read the moving and solemn account of the ruined Coliseum; read the darkly suggestive account of the Catacombs and the prisons; read the stirring account of the ascent of Vesuvius; read of Naples in the early sunrise-flush, and Capri in the lingering sunset-glow, of Parma with its cheerful glittering streets, of the ruined palazzos, the shadow-haunted churches, the

Descriptive
Power.

gleaming terraces, the vine-festoons of Genoa, the sweltering by-ways, the deep-blue star-sprinkled skies:—reflect upon this enchanting, bewildering mosaic of words, learn the unfailing skill of the artist, and observe the magic which conjures forth visions grey or glad, and enables us to see in one quick glance the decay and desolation of Piacenza or the consecration and splendour of Florence.

Yet I prefer to all these deliberate pictures, these set designs, those delicate vignettes with which he was wont to embellish his stories. How gently they steal upon the vision, and hold us enthralled! We linger over such a scene as that with Esther Summerson :

“Every day had been so bright and blue, that to ramble in the woods, and to see the light striking down among the transparent leaves, and sparkling in the beautiful interlacings of the shadows of the trees, while the birds poured out their songs, and the air was drowsy with the hum of insects, had been most delightful. We had one favourite spot, deep in moss and last year’s leaves, where

there were some felled trees from which the bark was all stripped off. Seated among these, we looked through a green vista supported by thousands of natural columns, the whitened stems of trees, upon a distant prospect made so radiant by its contrast with the shade in which we sat, and made so precious by the arched perspective through which we saw it, that it was like a glimpse of the better land."

This is the real Dickens—the Dickens who had long left Landport behind him, the Dickens who loved nature and mankind, the Dickens who had become a poet, a worker, a man of purpose, a teacher, a pioneer.

There will naturally be differences of opinion as to the order in which his works should be placed, nor is a definite classification possible in consequence of their variety, which prevents comparison of one with the other. Some stand in a class by themselves. Without dogmatizing, but expressing a purely personal opinion, I place the novels in the following order as they appeal to my own taste :

Novels
Classified

CLASS I: *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*,
and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (the three
masterpieces).

CLASS II: *Our Mutual Friend*, *Great
Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*,
The Mystery of Edwin Drood (the four
best stories).

CLASS III: *The Old Curiosity Shop*,
Dombey and Son, *Little Dorrit* (good
books, with faults of style, but redeemed
by notable characters).

CLASS IV: The Christmas Stories, especially
A Christmas Carol (didactic, on the
whole well conceived, entertaining, but
falling below the general level, the
decline being particularly marked in
The Battle of Life and *The Haunted
Man*).

CLASS V: *The Pickwick Papers* (the best
book of a rambling type).

CLASS VI: *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*,
Barnaby Rudge, *Hard Times* (four

novels betraying haste, occasional inferior workmanship, and the uncertainty arising either from amateurishness or exhausted inspiration).

The *Sketches by Boz*, *The Uncommercial Traveller*, the *Miscellaneous Essays*, the *Reprinted Pieces*, and *A Child's History of England*, cannot be definitely placed. They are merely chips from the workshop.

Any attempt to place his characters in an order of merit is foredoomed to disaster. Characters Classified. But among those most perfectly limned we may safely mention, among the men, Micawber, Gargery, Pecksniff, Jardine, old Peggotty, Tom Pinch, and Sidney Carton; among the women, Agnes Wickfield, Florence Dombey, Little Em'ly, Lizzie Hexam, Betsey Trotwood, Dolly Varden, and Bella Wilfer. The cleverest of his humorous characters are Montague Tigg, Dick Swiveller, Captain Cuttle, Vincent Crummles, Toots, and Sam Weller. His most pathetic characters are Paul Dombey, Sidney Carton, Bradley

Headstone, Stephen Blackpool, and Ham Peggotty. His greatest villain is Jonas Chuzzlewit. His unpleasantest character (apart from crime) is Mr. Murdstone. The man we are forced to admire and condemn is Steerforth. The most pitiable character is Magwitch. All of which conclusions are so arbitrary, that should they be questioned I can only defend them as my own preferences and prejudices, not capable of logical demonstration. But on one point there will be agreement—each character was made to stand for something real and vital, each was a type, each was an incarnation of some quality to be admired or shunned.

[*The Occult* (Page 36) : Dickens's dabbling in spiritualism and the supernatural would make a good subject for exhaustive treatment. He was probably induced to enter the field of controversy in consequence of certain flagrant frauds and impostures exposed in the '60's and '70's. His contemporaries had also been busy with the subject—Browning with *Dr. Sludge the Medium*, George Eliot with *The Lifted Veil*, and in particular Lytton with *A Strange Story* and *The Haunters and the Haunted*. Dickens's main contributions on which I found my conclusions were: *Two Ghost Stories*, *The Haunted House*, *To be Read at Dusk*, *The Spirit Business*, *Well-Authenticated Rappings*, *The Martyr Medium*, *Stories for the First of April*, and *Rather a Strong Dose*.]

CHAPTER THE THIRD

HIS LIBRARY

To understand Dickens as literary man, a little stress must be laid on his indebtedness to predecessors. And yet we are at once bewildered by a seeming paradox. On the one hand he was strongly influenced by a few authors whose works he had read in his youth, and it is only by recognizing this that we can account for the style he first adopted, and for the standard he set up. We have also to understand not only to what he adhered but from what he departed.

He began as an imitator, and the marvel is that he did not fail. The *Pickwick Papers* succeeded in spite of haphazard style and incoherent plan. In the short Preface Dickens frankly confesses that the projected issue of his first serial work was due to a dim recollection of "certain interminable novels

in that form, which used to be carried about the country by pedlars, and over some of which I remember to have shed innumerable tears before I had served my apprenticeship to Life." He tells us again in the Preface to *Oliver Twist* that he somehow came to hear about Yorkshire schools when he was "a not very robust child, sitting in by-places near Rochester Castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap, Tom Pipes, and Sancho Panza." Here we get the clue to his reading, and find the source of the influence which led him to give us the narrative-story rather than the definite plot. The laxity of the scheme was at times a temptation to him to divert from a main purpose, as in *Barnaby Rudge*; it led him into occasional discursiveness; it caused him to multiply incident, sometimes to advantage, sometimes not.

On the other hand, despite this decided influence of a preceding school of writers, nothing is further from fact than that Dickens was a learned man. He would have been the worse novelist of his own peculiar order had

he been. His occasional affectation of scholarship is amusing. He must have laboured hard to get classical allusions for Dr. Blimber. Most of his quotations are elementary and familiar. There is no academic tone in any of the volumes. Much knowledge would have been a burden to Dickens, and would have dulled and restrained his fancy. Pre-eminently he was the man to "write himself," and not to draw from accumulations of lore.

Yet, to say he was no scholar is not to imply that he was no reader. As boy and as man he revelled in books, but he did not feed upon them, and he rarely used them. His library was Scrooge's juvenile library, with the *Arabian Nights* and *Robinson Crusoe* prominent and probably most dog's-eared and bethumbed. We can easily enough discern the titles of the books on the little shelf : he repeats them again and again. Ali Baba and Gil Blas were as real to him as Roderick Random and Strap. He knew his Sandford and Merton, and did not particu-

larly care for Mr. Barlow. He delighted in the brave men of the old ballads, and he decidedly had his heroes of the history books. Drama, crude though it might be, had an irresistible attraction for him. He enjoyed Boswell, and the *Life of Johnson* was probably the most serious work he had read up to the age of twenty. Fielding and Smollett were his masters and models. We know how he regarded them from his passing reference in *David Copperfield*. But throughout his works he seldom quotes with earnest intention, nor does he use other authors as authorities.

None the less he was under a spell, and we learn of it through his unconscious imitations. We cannot, indeed, estimate Dickens fully unless we take note of these literary influences, slight and transitory as they may be. He specifies them in the essay, *Where we Stopped Growing*. But the real autobiographical illumination is in *David Copperfield*:

“My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I

had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Humphrey Clinker*, *Tom Jones*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time,—they, and *The Arabian Nights*, and the *Tales of the Genii*,—and did me no harm; for whatever harm was in them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it. It is astonishing to me now, how I found time, in the midst of my porings and blunderings over heavier themes, to read those books as I did. It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me) by impersonating my favourite characters in them—as I did—and by putting Mr. and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones—which I did too. I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have sustained my own idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch, I verily believe. I had a greedy relish for a few volumes of *Voyages and Travels*—I forget what, now—that were on those shelves; and for days and days I can remember to

Copperfield's
Stories.

have gone about my region of our house, armed with the centrepiece out of an old set of boot-trees—the perfect realization of Captain Somebody of the Royal British Navy, in danger of being beset by savages, and resolved to sell his life at a great price. The Captain never lost dignity from having his ears boxed with the Latin Grammar. I did: but the Captain was a Captain and a hero, in despite of all the grammars of all the languages in the world, dead or alive.

“This was my only and my constant comfort. When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every foot in the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them. I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I *know* that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr. Pickle, in the parlour of our little village alehouse.”

I have quoted the passage in full, because

it is a summary and an exposition in itself, and tells us both the extent and the limitation of Dickens's literary education. Many such revealing notes are interspersed in the novels and the essays. When the lonely boy at Blunderstone had become the scholar at Creakle's wretched seminary, it was these early books which again became his solace and his inspiration.

“It happened on one occasion, when Steerforth was doing me the honour of talking to me in the playground, that I hazarded the observation that something or somebody—I forget what now—was like something or somebody in *Peregrine Pickle*. He said nothing at the time; but when I was going to bed at night, asked me if I had got that book? I told him no, and explained how it was that I had read it, and all those other books of which I had made mention.

“‘And do you recollect them?’ Steerforth said.

“‘Oh, yes,’ I replied; I had a good memory, and I believed I recollected them very well.

“‘Then I tell you what, young Copperfield,’ said Steerforth, ‘you shall tell ’em to

me. . . . We'll go over 'em one after another. We'll make some regular Arabian Nights of it.'

"I felt extremely flattered by this arrangement, and we commenced carrying it into execution that very evening. What ravages I committed on my favourite authors in the course of my interpretations of them I am not in a condition to say, and should be very unwilling to know; but I had a profound faith in them, and I had, to the best of my belief, a simple earnest manner of narrating what I did narrate; and these qualities went a long way. . . .

"We seem, to me, to have been months over *Peregrine*, and months more over the other stories. The institution never flagged for want of a story, I am certain. . . . It was a great jest of his [Traddles] to pretend that he couldn't keep his teeth from chattering, whenever mention was made of an Alguazil in connection with the adventures of Gil Blas; and I remember that when Gil Blas met the captain of the robbers in Madrid, this unlucky joker counterfeited such an ague of terror that he was overheard by Mr. Creakle, who was prowling about the passage, and handsomely flogged for disorderly conduct in the bedroom.

"Whatever I had within me that was

romantic and dreamy, was encouraged by so much story-telling in the dark; and in that respect the pursuit may not have been very profitable to me."

There is a perfect wealth of suggestion in these references. They give us a clear insight into a boy's mind and its mood; they name the volumes he knew and loved; they show the effect those volumes had upon him, and how he turned them to imaginative account; and they remind us that the promptings thus received stimulated the little reader to authorship on his own account. To take a small illustration of this truth first, who does not recall that glorious burlesque of boys' tales of derring-do wherein the gallant Captain Robin Boldheart of the pirate schooner, *The Beauty*, defied the Latin Grammar-master who had aroused his scorn and hate? The story was included in the *Holiday Romances* of the year 1868; the germ is found in *David Copperfield* of 1849; and in those pages it is predated to a boy-

Sources of
Inspiration.

hood which we cannot but infer was the author's own.

But there are larger considerations than these arising out of the striking details of the youthful confessions. We find the list of books dear to the boy's heart frequent in his thoughts, and most tenacious in his memory : the books which he began by consciously or unconsciously imitating, and, when imitation ceased, which served almost invariably for quotation. In *The Uncommercial Traveller*, for example, he recurs to them with youthful zest and untiring devotion. His storehouse was limited, but he drew upon it exhaustively. Few men have made a little knowledge do them such great service.

Fielding
Imitated.

I think it has scarcely been observed how slavishly Dickens at times followed his models, but the few parallels I propose to give will convey some idea of the truth. Naturally I begin with Fielding. Let the opening chapter of *Martin Chuzzlewit* be read, with its delightful burlesque genealogy of the Chuzzlewit family, its mock serious-

ness, its sham heroics, its subtle underlying satire. Fielding had not only conceived the same idea for the family to which Joseph Andrews belonged, but he seems to have suggested some of the very details which Dickens, more ornate and less restrained, elaborated with so much effect. I am not sure that Dickens plagiarized. Just as memories slumber and are revived on occasion, so it may have been that these seedling thoughts quickened suddenly in Dickens's mind and appeared to be spontaneous. It was for others to trace them back to the original germ. Were there only an odd instance or two the argument would count for little. But when the evidence is cumulative it becomes irresistible.

Fielding thus begins :

“Mr. Joseph Andrews, the hero of our ensuing history, was esteemed to be the only son of Gaffer and Gammer Andrews. . . . As to his ancestors, we have searched with great diligence, but little success, being unable to trace them further than his grandfather, who,

as an elderly person in the parish remembers to have heard his father say, was an excellent cudgel-player. Whether he had any ancestors before this, we must leave to the opinion of our curious reader, finding nothing of sufficient certainty to rely on. However, we cannot omit inserting an epitaph which an ingenious friend of ours hath communicated :

‘ Stay, traveller, for underneath this pew
Lies fast asleep that merry man Andrew.’

.

The words are almost out of the stone with antiquity. But it is needless to observe that Andrew here is writ without an *s*, and is, besides, a Christian name. . . . To waive, therefore, a circumstance which, though mentioned in conformity to the exact rules of biography, is not greatly material, I proceed to things of more consequence.

“ Indeed, it is sufficiently certain that he had as many ancestors as the best man living, and perhaps, if we look five or six hundred years backwards, might be related to some persons of very great figure at present, whose ancestors within half the last century are buried in as great obscurity.”

In *Martin Chuzzlewit* the idea has been seized upon, frolicked with as only Dickens

knew how, and extended to several pages : but it is always Fielding.

Until Dickens developed into the novelist proper, with a central plot around which the many characters clustered, or with a leading theme which human impersonators were to illustrate, he was practically no more than a narrator of adventures loosely connected, and his *Pickwick Papers*, with master and servant placed in strange situations, is in essence and spirit Smollett's *Roderick Random* and Fielding's *Tom Jones*. We are taken rapidly through panoramic scenes in which the hero and his faithful attendant figure conspicuously ; one adventure ends only for another to begin ; and a medley of diverse experiences is simply compounded into a composite story by the recurrence of the names of the leading actors.

The tragi-comical bedroom error which befell Mr. Pickwick at Ipswich had been anticipated by Fielding, whose Parson Adams —“partly owing to his goodness, and partly to his inadvertency”—fell into a similar hair-breadth 'scape. Dickens, writing so much

Similarity of
Episodes.

later and for a public with different taste, toned down the incident; otherwise it is the same. Mr. Pickwick did but wander into a lady's room, jump into bed, and discover his mistake only when "the lady in the curl-papers" entered the apartment. Fielding, more robust, places Parson Adams in a situation of less delicacy though of equal innocence, and the sequel is not unlike that in which the outraged Mr. Magnus and Mr. Pickwick were concerned :

"Fanny cried out, 'O heavens, where am I?'

" 'Bless me, where am I?' said the parson.

"Then Fanny screamed, Adams leaped out of bed, and Joseph stood, as the tragedians call it, like the Statue of Surprise.

" 'How came she into my room?' cried Adams.

" 'How came you into hers?' cried Joseph. . . .

"Adams then related all that had happened; and when he had ended, Joseph told him it was plain he had been mistaken by turning to the right instead of the left." (Bk. iv. cap. xiv.)

The muddle-headed autocratic country magistracy were, again, alike the butt of Dickens and Fielding. Mr. Nupkins of Ipswich was the lineal descendant of “one of his Majesty’s justasses of the piece for Zummersetshire.” Country Magistrates.

“The justice had only a man and woman to commit to Bridewell. The squire asked his worship what crime these two young people had been guilty of. ‘No great crime,’ answered the justice; ‘I have only ordered them to Bridewell for a month.’ ‘But what is their crime?’ repeated the squire. ‘Larceny, an’t please your honour,’ said Scrub. ‘Ay,’ says the justice, ‘a kind of felonious, larcenous thing.’ . . . ‘Still, I am ignorant of the crime—the fact I mean,’ said the squire. ‘Why, there it is in peaper,’ answered the justice—[the offence was ‘cutting one hazel twig of the value of three halfpence or thereabouts’].” (Bk. iv. cap. iv.)

In the end the justice, on receipt of private information, acted like Mr. Nupkins—he “burned his mittimus, and the constable was sent about his business”—a fate which like-

wise overtook that unhappy constable, Grummer.

Nupkins
Anticipated.

But there is a still better example of the Nupkins style in *Tom Jones*. The person satirized was Mr. Western himself, the father of Sophia, called upon "to execute justice-ship" on Mrs. Honour for disrespect towards her mistress. The first sentence seems to be even more like Dickens than Fielding, so familiar are we with the former's views :

"Luckyly the clerk had a qualification, some understanding in the law of this realm. He therefore whispered in the ear of the justice that he would exceed his authority by committing the girl to Bridewell, as there had been no attempt to break the peace; 'for I am afraid, sir,' says he, 'you cannot legally commit any one to Bridewell only for ill-breeding.'

"In matters of high importance the justice was not always inattentive to these admonitions of his clerk."

Fielding proceeds that, as the justice "already had two informations against him in the King's Bench, and had no curiosity to

try a third"—(somewhat reminiscent, too, of the experiences of Mr. Fang in *Oliver Twist*)—he

“put on a most wise and significant countenance, and after a preface of several hums and hahs, told his sister that upon more mature deliberation, he was of opinion that ‘as there was no breaking up of the peace, such as the law,’ says he, ‘calls breaking open a door, or breaking a hedge, or breaking a head, or any such sort of breaking, the matter did not amount to a felonious kind of thing, nor trespasses, nor damages, and therefore there was no punishment in the law for it.’ Mrs. Western said she knew the law much better; that she had known servants very severely punished for affronting their masters. . . .

“‘Like enough,’ cries the squire; ‘it may be so in London: but the law is different in the country.’

“The dispute was at length referred by both parties to the clerk, who decided it in favour of the magistrate.” (Bk. vii. cap. ix.)

This is Mr. Nupkins, prompted by his clerk, to the life. Such coincidences abound,

A few
Parallels.

but the curious reader, who is familiar with *Tom Jones*, may be left to discover them for himself in the sure and certain hope that, whatever his fortune in that respect, he will be abundantly entertained on the way. He will find the Fleet scenes in *Amelia* anticipating much that Dickens described in *Little Dorrit*, and perhaps find a likeness between *Amelia* and *Little Dorrit* also. He will even discover in Fielding that some one else besides Mrs. Merdle possessed a "piece of flint which the good woman wore in her bosom by way of heart," and that Mrs. Slipslop might have been sister to Mrs. Nickleby; and he will see the "poor relations" figuring very much in eighteenth-century society as Dickens depicted them figuring in the nineteenth century. But Dickens may have got more than a hint on this oft-repeated theme from Charles Lamb, whose vivid chapter on the subject does not need recalling.

Smollett supplies some resemblances scarcely less striking both in *Roderick Random* and *Humphrey Clinker*. Matthew

Bramble has not inaptly been compared to Mr. Pickwick; the descriptions of "Society" in Bath might excusably be transferred from the pages of the one volume to the other; and Clinker himself, devoted to his master, and "a great original," suggests Weller in his more serious aspect of the faithful and disinterested servant.

If Dickens did not get a number of his ideas direct from the *Life of Johnson* the coincidences are amazing. Some of the references are direct enough, and practically indisputable; others, of course, belong to the class of literary parallels for which there is no accounting.

Pickwick and
Dr. Johnson.

The *Pickwick Papers* seem to me to have been but a re-modelling of Boswell's *Life*—the same characters reappearing under new names, the same ideas finding a different expression,—everything the same *à fond*, but modified or distorted, as it passes from fact to fiction, from reality to romance. The oracular Pickwick, founder of a Club, is Johnson, both with their bands of devoted

followers and admirers, both faulty enough but supreme in their domain, both unquestioned in authority. Pickwick ever finds a welcome at Trundle's; Johnson at Thrale's. Pickwick has his plausible Jingle to beguile him and lead him astray; Johnson has his Richard Savage, whose character was "marked by profligacy, insolence, and ingratitude." Pickwick trusted Jingle even when he told the most amazing of concocted narratives; and "Johnson's partiality for Savage made him entertain no doubt of his story, however extraordinary and improbable." Pickwick could forgive his worst enemy when that enemy was in distress; and of Johnson, his biographer said—"When I wondered that he was very kind to a man of whom I had heard a very bad character, 'He is now become miserable, and that ensures the protection of Johnson,' was the remark."

It would not be fair to place any significance on the fact that both men travelled by coach, put up at inns, drank the waters at Bath, attended reviews at Rochester, stayed

"Pickwick and Principle."

in Birmingham, and left descriptions of Salisbury plain. It might not even be fair to emphasize that Johnson's contemned Chesterfield was Dickens's odious Sir John Chester. But if the Pickwick Club, with its personal triumphs, and its personal quarrels, were not the Literary Club founded by Johnson and Reynolds, then resemblances count for nothing. The Mr. Blotton of Pickwick's time, who raised objections and cast aspersions, had his prototype in Sir John Hawkins of Johnson's time—and the same fate awaited both. "Sir John Hawkins," wrote Boswell, "represents himself as a 'seceder' from this Society, and assigns as the reason of his 'withdrawing' himself from it, that its late hours were inconsistent with his family arrangements. In this he is not accurate; for the fact was, that he one evening attacked Mr. Burke in so rude a manner, that all the company testified their displeasure; and at their next meeting his reception was such that he never came again." Delightfully Pickwickian! It was not Sir

John's first offence. He had maligned Johnson twice in reference to Garrick; wherefore he came to a deserved end.

Benign
Despots.

The Cervantes element creeps a little into Pickwick also, for the genial old gentleman in gold-rimmed spectacles was an affable Don Quixote, ready to champion any cause, ready to right any wrong, ready to help the weak, and ready to investigate any delusion no matter how absurd. Johnson in his statelier way was the same type, throwing himself with ardour into the cause of Dr. Dodd, investigating the Cock Lane Ghost, the Chatterton forgeries, and the Ossian mysteries, and befriending Savage and George Psalmanazar. Yet what autocrats both were, what benign tyrants, unable to brook contradiction, and taking rebuke as an affront! When Mr. Pickwick appeared in pumps for a dance—"You in silk stockings!" exclaimed a gentleman jocosely. "And why not, why not, sir?" said Mr. Pickwick, turning warmly on him. "Oh, of course, there is no reason why you should not wear them," responded the gentle-

man. "I imagine not, I imagine not, sir," said Mr. Pickwick in a very peremptory tone. And thus Dr. Johnson: The argument was whether a man who intended to shoot himself would not take two pistols to make sure. Johnson said No. Mr. Beauclerk said Yes, and added—"This is what you don't know, and I do." "One thing *I* know," said the Great Cham, "which you don't seem to know, that you are very uncivil." Johnson told me, added Boswell, that when he considered that there were present a young lord and an eminent traveller, two men of the world with whom he had never dined before, he was apprehensive that they might think they had a right to take such liberties with him as Beauclerk did, and therefore resolved not to let it pass. Quite the Pickwickian spirit—"Pickwick and Principle," as Sam Weller would say. Strangely enough, the argument followed on the story which irresistibly reminds us of Sam Weller's anecdote. "Mr. —," it runs, "who loved buttered muffins, but durst not eat them because they disagreed

with his stomach, resolved to shoot himself; and then he ate three buttered muffins for breakfast before shooting himself." The narrative is breezier, and the moral somewhat obscured, when Mr. Weller seizes upon it; but it is Johnsonian all the same. And would not the ever-youthful Pickwick have echoed these sentiments when he started with gusto on his perambulations?—

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "I love the acquaintance of young people; because, in the first place, I don't like to think myself growing old. In the next place, young acquaintances must last the longest, if they do last. I love the young dogs of this age; they have more wit and humour and knowledge of life than we had; but then the dogs are not so good scholars."

But it is not in *Pickwick* alone that we find suggestions of Johnson. Was not the great lexicographer the nearest analogue in life to the immortal Micawber, with his rolling periods, his love of letter-writing, his personal peculiarities, and his grandiose

touches which, for want of a better word, we can only describe as Micawberisms? Is there not quite a Micawberish tone about this dictum of Johnson's?—

“Speaking of economy, he remarked it was hardly worth while to save anxiously twenty pounds a year. If a man could save to that degree, so as to enable him to assume a different rank in society, then, indeed, it might answer some purpose.”

Micawber's flowing words and rolling periods are surely modelled on that cumulative style of Johnson's, in which sentence follows sentence like wave following wave, and ends in an outpour of antithesis. There is one letter in particular which might be either Micawber's or Johnson's—perhaps the inquiring student would like to discover for himself to which of them the credit should be given. The letter is that which concludes with such tremendous turgidity—

“If I can have it in my power to calm any harassing disquiet, to excite any virtuous

desire, to rectify any important opinion, or fortify any generous resolution, you need not doubt but I shall at least wish to prefer the pleasure of gratifying a friend much less esteemed than yourself, before the gloomy calm of idle vacancy.”

The parallel is easily discovered.¹

Dickens as a parodist has been very little considered. Yet we ought not to forget his

¹ Dickens read and knew his Boswell so well that on several occasions he set himself deliberately to imitate the style of dialogue. A delightful catch of the mannerism will be found in the epistles to Wilkie Collins :

Johnson : Sir, if it be not irrational in a man to count his feathered bipeds before they are hatched, we will conjointly astonish them before next year. Boswell : Sir, I hardly understand you. Johnson : You never understand anything. Boswell (in a sprightly manner) : Perhaps, sir, I am all the better for it. Johnson (savagely) : I don't know but that you are. There is Lord Carlisle (smiling) : he never understands anything, and yet the dog is well enough. Then, sir, there is Forster : he understands many things, and yet the fellow is fretful. Again, sir, there is Dickens, with a facile way with him like Davy, sir—like Davy—yet I am told that the man is lying at a hedge ale-house by the sea-shore in Kent, as long as they will trust him. Boswell : But there are no hedges by the sea in Kent, sir. Johnson : And why not sir ? Boswell (at a loss) : I don't know, sir, unless— Johnson (thundering) : Let us have no unlessees, sir !

Thousand and One Humbugs in which he so skilfully adopted the style and structure of the stories which form the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, giving a quaint turn to the nomenclature, and with considerable art dealing satirically with modern wrongs in antique phraseology. Parody and Plagiarism.

Deliberate quotation is comparatively rare in Dickens, save for humorous effect. Silas Wegg's fragments seem to me rather laboriously introduced, but Dick Swiveller's are deliciously spontaneous. Swiveller's Club of "choice spirits" may have had for its original founder none other than Captain Bobadil who knew "some peculiar and choice spirits to whom I am extraordinarily engaged"; but if this reference to Ben Jonson seems far-fetched, there is one justification for making it, that Dickens, as actor, knew his Jonson well, and from *Every Man in his Humour* derived an idea for Sim Tappertit and his legs:

"*Stephen:* How dost thou like my leg, Brain-worm?"

“*Brain-worm*: A very good leg, Master Stephen! but the woollen stocking does not commend it so well.

“*Step*. . . . I think my leg would show in a silk hose.

“*Brai*. Believe me, Master Stephen, rarely well.

“*Step*. In sadness, I think it would; I have a reasonably good leg.

“*Brai*. You have an excellent good leg, Master Stephen; but I cannot stay to praise it longer now, and I am very sorry for 't.

“*Step*. Another time will serve, *Brain-worm*.” (Act i. sc. ii.)

Old plays undoubtedly furnished many illustrations of Dickens's use of ideas and his reproduction of character. There is a strong family likeness between Mr. Flamwell, in the *Sketches by Boz*—the “spoffish” toady, who pretended to know everybody—and Goldsmith's Mr. Lofty in *The Good-Natured Man*, who had exactly the same boastful weakness. The whole of the essay on begging letter-writers and similar impostors should be carefully compared with Mr. Puff's confessions in Sheridan's *Critic*. And

when in the *Battle of Life* Dickens remarks a little sententiously, "We count by changes and events within us. Not by years," he was but echoing the words of Joanna Baillie in one of her dramas, and of Festus ("We live in deeds, not years"), and, perhaps more directly, Shakespeare's *Richard II*—

"So sighs, and tears, and groans,
Shew minutes, times, and hours."

A catalogue of quotations would be of no interest in itself; but a few facts, unsystematically noted in the course of reading, may serve as clues to the Dickens library, and indicate his preferences. In *The Uncommercial Traveller* he mentioned *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver*, *Roderick Random* (twice), Richardson, Dr. Johnson, *The Arabian Nights*, *Don Quixote*, *Sandford and Merton*, Thomas Moore (twice), Shakespeare (once), and Carlyle (to whom he dedicated *Hard Times*). In *The Holly Tree* he referred to Smollett, Sterne, and "Monk" Lewis, the author of *Alonzo the Brave*. In the *Reprinted*

Favourite
Quotations.

Pieces he quoted Benjamin Franklin, *The Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, Washington Irving. I think he had read Poe's tale of *The Black Cat* before he wrote *The Clock Case: A Confession Found in a Prison in the Time of Charles II*. But what an exiguous list it is. Well might it be said that Dickens was the least bookish of all writers. "We have never grown the thousandth part of an inch out of *Robinson Crusoe*," he said, in that remarkable essay, *Where we Stopped Growing*. "He fits us just as well, and in exactly the same way, as when we were among the smallest of the small. We have never grown out of his parrot, or his dog, or his fowling-piece, or the horrible old staring goat he came upon in the cave, or his rusty money, or his cap, or umbrella. . . . Our growth stopped when the great Haroun Alraschid spelt his name so, and when nobody had ever heard of a Jin. . . . When Blue Beard came over mountains, and knew no more of slang than of Sanscrit. . . . When Don Quixote might have been right after all in going about

to succour the distressed, and when the priest and the barber were no more justified in burning his books than they would have been in making a bonfire of our own two bedroom shelves. When Gil Blas had a heart, . . . and when it was a wonderful accident that the end of that interesting story in the *Sentimental Journey* was not to be found in our Edition though we looked for it a thousand times." The child-mind was his to the end. It knew nothing of mustiness and pedantry. It remained fresh, and what it gave forth flowed from its own deep wells of inspiration. The art of some men is in using books. The genius of Dickens was in doing without them.

Like the wonder-worker in one of his beloved Oriental tales, he conjured with the aid of the smallest of vessels; but that which was emitted proved gigantic.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

HIS LAST MYSTERY

THERE were two plots upon which Dickens undoubtedly prided himself. The value of one we shall never conclusively ascertain; the other we can appraise.

Personally I think the plot of *Our Mutual Friend* to be poor, unconvincing, and occasionally clumsy. The secret of John Harmon should either have been better kept, or there should have been no air of mystery at all.

A Plot that
Fails.

Boffin's methods are not only primitive and repugnant, but they lead us to doubt whether they would have been effective. Why should the girl he disgusted with his affected miserliness necessarily fly to the arms of the man she despised? Could a man of Boffin's simple nature have acted so schemingly, and have adopted so roundabout a course to fulfil his object? Too much is left to chance, and too

many people are made miserable that one person should be made happy. Boffin's character undergoes violent change, and we cannot reconcile the simple old soul of the earlier chapters with the consummate actor of the latter chapters. John Harmon himself is stagey, and his in-and-out business, his appearances and disappearances, his discovery and recognition by some, and his total evasion by others, make an undue strain upon credulity. He is too much like the actor with loud "aside" speeches which every one hears except those who are nearest to him; and the plot fails because it is mainly composed of make-believe. Then the story is over-weighted with detached incidents and by groups of disconnected characters. It degenerates into medley. Yet Dickens undoubtedly thought his plot subtle, ingenious, and clever—which is one more proof that as a maker of plots he lacked craft.

I have sometimes a fear, which will not be repressed, that *Edwin Drood* might have been equally disappointing, and that he over-

rated his powers. Certainly this would be the case if, as some of the would-be solvers assert, he intended to unlock the riddle with a key which remained to be manufactured in the latter portion of the work—that is, by introducing an entirely new character who had no part or interest in the earlier events.

Dickens was not so utterly inartistic as that. Even in the story of Jonas Chuzzlewit he manifested some adroitness in manipulating the Nadgett episodes; and we may be sure that in the more careful design of the Drood mystery he would exercise greater skill. I have already said, however, that as a writer of detective tales Dickens was a failure. His *Hunted Down* is the only exception to the rule. But in the Drood volume we come to an entirely new set of circumstances, and a new mood on the part of the author.

So many books have been left unfinished, from Virgil's *Æneid* to the last novels of Thackeray and Stevenson, that one's first inquiry might be why an absorbing interest

should be sustained in the unfinished work of Charles Dickens. It is due to the fact that it issues a challenge to the human intellect. It proclaims itself a "mystery," and, in more or less set terms, defies elucidation. When we find the declaration of Charles Dickens that he possessed a "new and incommunicable idea" we are resolved, as was John Forster, to wrest it from him. Here is a riddle of the Sphinx, and every Ædipus is ready to take the risk of unravelling it.

There was no idea which Dickens hugged more closely, one whose possibilities and varieties of treatment pleased his fancy more, than that a man, assumed to be dead, and treated as non-existent, should suddenly reappear in new guise and confound and convict his supposed murderer. This was the famous "Watched-by-the-Dead" theory on which so much stress was laid by Richard Anthony Proctor—a theory which is traced from *Barnaby Rudge*, one of the earliest novels, to *Our Mutual Friend*, one of the latest, and a theory which some contend was

"Watched by
the Dead."

intended to be wrought out in its most consummate form in *Edwin Drood*. On first consideration this seems likely; on second consideration it is impossible.

A Secret
Discovered.

Not only had Dickens exhausted that theory, but he was aware he had exhausted it. Edgar Allan Poe, in his penetrating essay on the first chapters of *Barnaby Rudge*, had plainly told him that this "secret" was no real secret, had triumphantly foretold the sequel to the premiss, and had declared that "the intention once perceived, traces of the design are found on every page, and points break out in all directions like stars." In course of time, so familiar did Dickens's "dead man" devices become by repetition, that there was nothing easier than for keen students and analysts to anticipate exactly what parts would be played by Meltham, Rudge, Rokesmith, and all the secret or disguised characters in "Watched-by-the-Dead" stories. The fact was not lost upon Dickens, who eventually retorted upon the proleptic and too-discerning critics by declar-

ing that their discovery of a presumed “deception” in one novel had never been designed by him as a deception at all. In <sup>An Abandoned
Idea.</sup> the well-known “Postscript” to *Our Mutual Friend* he gave the seers and prophets to understand that he had outwitted them after all, for they had only found what he had never concealed, but, on the contrary, had been “at great pains to suggest.” “An artist,” he added caustically, “may perhaps be trusted to know what he is about in his own vocation, and I was not alarmed by anticipation.” Then he disclosed his real purpose—“To keep for a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in that leading incident . . . that was at once the most interesting and the most difficult part of my design.”

There are here two matters for consideration. The first is the tacit acknowledgment of Dickens that his older and constantly recurring device of doubled parts was played out, and that he had originated something new and unexpected. The second is that he

Another Plan. had not wholly abandoned the favourite idea, but had only given it a new turn; or, to repeat his own words, he had "worked out another purpose originating in the leading incident"—the purpose carefully concealed to the last, the reader boggled with the thought that the familiar theme would have the familiar ending, and then the dramatic disclosure sprung upon him as a surprise.

As Dickens reached this turning-point in his methods in 1864, when he planned *Our Mutual Friend*, it is obvious that if he ever intended to attempt to mystify his public again it would not be by the old expedient of transforming characters and recalling the dead to life, but by working out some other purpose "originating in the leading incident." The *Drood* volume came in 1870, and contained "a curious and incommunicable idea," "an unsuspected purpose originating in the leading incident, and difficult to work."

We now have to put to ourselves three questions: What was "new"? What was

“incommunicable”? What was “difficult to work”?

It would be entirely “new,” with Dickens, if the supposed dead man, unlike Rudge, and Meltham, and John Harmon, were in this case proved to be really dead; and it would be “incommunicable” if the mysterious watcher of the assassin were not such an one as in all the previous novels, but some person in the story, “marked out from the first,” yet so concealed as to run only an infinitesimal risk of detection. Then, as Poe said, when the mystery was pre-comprehended “the points would break out in all directions like stars”; and then, as Dickens avowed, we should find that the real mystery was in a purpose “originating in the leading incident,” the leading incident being no mystery at all, though set forth as one. All this would be “difficult to work,” especially one detail which, so far as I can judge, was to constitute the supreme surprise in the end.

It was necessary for the author to cover up his tracks as speedily as possible, and to

suggest false outlets. Thus, a main point is whether or not Drood is dead. Dickens always suggests that he may have escaped and may reappear. Rosa Bud, long after his disappearance, reviews the situation and goes through the series of arguments, leaving the conclusion in doubt. The sagacious reader at once jumps to a conclusion of his own—the conclusion Dickens wished, and, of course, the wrong one. If it is such an arguable matter, be sure Drood has escaped. Exactly so. Half the mystery is gone if a leading character has finally fallen out. Dickens becomes blandly confidential—but it is the confidence-trick of the literary expert.

In three instances, Proctor's theory that Drood had escaped and would come again upon the stage in disguise, signally fails.¹ First, it assumes that Dickens would repeat the outworn plot of making "the dead"

¹ This chapter was written, and was delivered as a lecture, several years before the admirable volume, *About Edwin Drood*, by Professor Jackson, was published.

return. Secondly, it would leave unexplained, under those circumstances, the "dead" man's silence and his inactivity for six months in spite of his assailant's continuance of malignant and dangerous operations. Thirdly, it would not bring the story to a conclusion such as Dickens, with his strong dramatic instinct, would have been likely to conceive. And there was a fourth reason, which, though personal, is to one who venerates the memory and character of Charles Dickens, overwhelmingly strong. The theory that Drood survived involves the acceptance of the theory that Dickens had, in explicitly denying that fact on more than one occasion, openly and deliberately uttered to his closest friends and associates what was false. Incidentally, however, the circumstance that he had three times declared "Drood *was* dead" was a valuable enlightenment in another direction, for it demonstrated that this was never the prime mystery, and was never designed as the puzzle. After Number Two of the story

A Plain
Avowal.

there was to be "a curious interest steadily working up to Number Five which requires a good deal of art and self-denial." The guessing that Drood was alive did not disturb Dickens in the least.

Dickens liked to work on a basis of fact, and he found that basis in the history of a young Rochester citizen whose fate had remained a mystery until his corpse had been discovered hidden away; then his murder by a relative who had professed the deepest affection for him had been confirmed. But there is another circumstance, less known, more surprising, and far more significant. In 1869 (when *Edwin Drood* had not been begun) a story was submitted to Dickens by the Hon. Robert Lytton and accepted by him. It was called *John Acland*. In October, three months after Drood had been contemplated, but six months before the first number was issued, Dickens hurriedly and prematurely brought *John Acland* to a close, and explained to the author in writing his reason: "The story had been done before."

"John
Acland."

This was perfectly true; a similar story to *John Acland* is to be traced in a magazine of the period. But here comes the amazing series of coincidences. Lytton's story was of the murder of a man by one who was not only his close friend but his host; the crime was a mystery; the missing body could not be traced; and it was hinted that the man was not dead but might reappear. But eventually the corpse was found in an ice-house, and its identity was established by means of a watch. The parallels between the written story *John Acland* and the yet-to-be-written story *Edwin Drood* are thus too astounding for explanation. At all events, only one presents itself, and that is that both authors had read the previously published narrative, and had decided upon the treatment of a similar theme. One further detail in this history is worth recording. Dickens said in his letter to Lytton that he had altered the original title of the story from plain *John Acland* to *The "Disappearance" of John Acland*, because, he

explained, "this will leave the reader in doubt whether he really *was* murdered, until the end." The ruse must be compared with that adopted by Dickens in calling his own story *The Mystery*. It left the reader in doubt. That was the object.

What, then, was the secret? how was it to be disclosed? how are we now to penetrate it? At the time Dickens wrote his story he was under the influence of Wilkie Collins (whose *Woman in White* had just previously appeared in *Household Words*); and Collins made it part of his plan that every trifle, every chance episode, every seemingly casual item, should possess appositeness and importance and presently fall into its destined place. Dickens followed this method. When, in a mere parenthetical manner—an explanatory phrase or two inserted in a long conversation—he allowed the fact to glide in that some one had been in the habit of disguising herself, and that a girl had once worn a boy's attire, we cannot dismiss it as irrelevant. This will prove to be a link in some

'Trifles light
as air.'

chain slowly fashioning in the course of the history. It is as weighty in its way as the fact that Durdles always carried his keys with him, that Jasper wore a long silk scarf round his delicate throat, that the boy Deputy waited near the Cathedral at night to stone Durdles home, that quicklime will destroy even the boots on the feet, and that a girl with a rich brown complexion had long hair, a deep voice, and dark eyes. It is as weighty as the laconic observation of Mr. Grewgious that he had "just come from Miss Landless" when he proceeded to watch the deadly effect of his message to Jasper of the broken engagement; and it is as weighty as the stonemason's remembrance of an eerie Christmas-Eve dream when he heard a strange cry like the howl of a dog. All trifles—but all circumstantial evidence!—nothing wasted, everything to be turned to account, every portion however minute fitting perfectly in that irrefragable chain made up of countless links.

But—
"Confirmation
Strong."

And, all the time, Dickens continues to

"Mr.
Datchery."

suggest that Drood is alive, and may at any moment leap into the light. Then, at the psychological moment, Datchery enters, wearing a big wig. What dullard could fail to fall into the trap? A man is missing—another man appears—they must be one and the same! Such acumen is worthy of Dogberry himself. We can imagine how the creator of Mrs. Harris roared.

Dickens, by apparent frankness, wished his readers to "jump" at Drood—because that was not the solution. So he brought into prominent conjunction two facts delightfully easy to misunderstand. But if Datchery were not Drood, who could he be? He could be half-a-dozen persons—up to a certain point. We may find one very plausible reason for believing that Mr. Bazzard was Datchery, two superficial reasons for Lieutenant Tartar, three very strong reasons for Mr. Grewgious: and, according to all logic, the majority must rule the decision. It was part and parcel of Dickens's purpose to throw out hints as to one character and

another; his secret would have gone had he made every person impossible but one. But each identification fails. The preposterous Bazzard theory rests entirely on one half-humorous phrase, and the Tartar theory on two doubtful declarations. Grewgious, on the other hand, scores at least half-a-dozen points, and he seems to be a very likely solu-^{Misfit}tion of the problem of Datchery until we are confronted with that impassable barrier which Dickens had deliberately reared—the inability of the “angular” man, with his unconcealable mannerisms, his curious tone, his dryness, and his halting speech, to transform himself into a genial “old buffer” of totally different tone and with perfect fluency of conversation. These are all false signals, deliberately devised to cause a divagation from the right road. They lead us along smooth paths—far away from the goal we seek.

But if, after granting “points” to each of these characters, we still find one left with double the number of the best, must we not,

A Workable
Hypothesis.

according to mathematical law, give that character preference, or have we learnt our Euclid in vain? If, too, we find that by substituting that character for Datchery we get a perfectly consistent story and a very appropriate and dramatic conclusion, must we not still give it preference? If, again, the acceptance of that character entails no breach of logic, but on the contrary reveals perfect coherence in the story, and shows "an interest steadily working up from the first" and "a new idea, difficult to work"—then are we not justified in giving it absolute pre-eminence?

The crucial question follows: Do we find such a character? It was not Drood, because Drood was dead, as Dickens avowed; it was not a person who already was aware of Jasper's guilt, or the long delay in action would be unjustified, and the watching would be unnecessary; it was not one who was outside the story and therefore had no personal interest in the sequel. It was one, on the contrary, who had the strongest reasons for

undertaking the task and who had a proved ability to perform it; one who had need to wait and watch; one who was subtly marked out from the first for the mission, yet as subtly concealed from detection. I find such an one in Helena Landless, the real heroine of the story.

Literature and the drama will be searched in vain for a *young* woman playing the part of an *elderly* man. It is "a new idea, and difficult to work." The way has to be very carefully prepared to reconcile the reader to the possibility, and to enable a clear reason to be recognized why such an impersonation should take place. But Dickens skilfully laid his foundations, and subtly introduced his details. There was a young woman, he tells us, accustomed to disguise from her very earliest years; one who, as a mere child, in her desperation, had run away from home three times and "each time dressed as a boy." This same woman, coming from Ceylon, had a rich dark complexion, the casual mention of which scarcely impresses

"The not
impossible
She."

us until we realize that such a complexion would also suit an "elderly buffer," suggestive of a sailor, did she ever choose to pass as one. This young woman, we are given to understand in a score of ways, both direct and indirect, possessed great force of character, and in emergency—even as a child—could show "the daring of a man." All this is vouchsafed us long before we have any reason to believe she is designed or would be needed to take a man's part. It seems natural enough, ordinary enough, that this woman should have abundant tresses; and we scarcely realize why so much emphasis is laid upon that simple circumstance until it dawns upon us later that if ever she wore a wig it would have to be a noticeably large one. But would she not in such a contingency first remove those luxuriant tresses? Even as we put that question to ourselves, we see that Dickens had again answered in advance, for this girl was to have a lover who admired her wild beauty, a man to whom she was passionately devoted; and the one act she would shrink from (one that

every woman shrinks from) would be her own disfigurement.

Thus were the links forged so quietly, so insidiously, and withal so delicately fitted and ingrooved in advance, that we barely comprehend their strength, their precision, and their perfection until, in a new light, we give them closer scrutiny, a new examination. Then, in a flash, the revelation bursts upon us. The more, then, do we become convinced that they were forged for a purpose, and that Dickens from the first intended Helena Landless to fulfil a great and arduous mission as the watcher and avenger, Datchery.

But why should she concern herself with the avenging of the murder of Edwin Drood, a youth who was nothing to her, who had never aroused her interest, and whom she had some reason to dislike? Notice, again, how well the foundations are laid. She was the avowed protectress of Rosa Bud, who had won her deep gratitude and affection, and she was the ever-ready helper and ally of her twin brother, her double self, with

An
Overpowering
Motive.

whom she had "a perfect understanding." In avenging Drood's murder, and in convicting Jasper, she was saving these two, dearest and closest to her. It was not so much Drood's fate that concerned her as Jasper's suppression. It was not the mischief he had done as the mischief he still intended to do that spurred her to action, and that was why Dickens brought out with such terrible force the malignant nature of the man who—no matter what evil he had wrought in the past—was intent on further evils in the future. And the two who would suffer, the two who were in imminent danger, were those whom Helena Landless above all others would most ardently desire to save, and would incur any risk to aid. Once again, the deep and well-laid purpose of the author becomes manifest, every detail evolved, every item requisite, every fragment, however detached, having its appointed relationship and place, to the finishing and perfecting of the intricate design.

Helena Landless is almost masculine in

character. The terrors which appalled her brother never made her tremble. When she had seen Jasper's malignant influence at work she vowed that she would "not be afraid of him under any circumstances." When Rosa needed help, it was Helena who proffered it. When her brother fled to London as a refuge Helena stayed behind to live down scandal. Strength, a man's strength, manifest everywhere. Yet she was the one leading person in the Cloisterham circle whom Jasper would be unable to recognize. Only once did he hear her speak, and then at a distance. At the end of six months even he, with his delicate ear, would not know her voice: it was an unfamiliar sound. This difficulty avoided, the rest was comparatively easy.

Suppose, however, this theory is incorrect, that Drood was only half-murdered, and that he reappeared; then carry the matter to its only possible conclusion and observe the waste of material, the number of non-sequiturs, and the loss of important char-

The Weak
Alternative.

acters. First, Jasper is spoilt as a thorough-paced villain, for it would be shown that he had badly and irretrievably bungled in his cleverly-laid schemes. But Richard Proctor himself admitted that "nothing more sensational had ever been invented in fiction than the terrible punishment devised for Jasper," and this confirms what Dickens himself suggested and what Forster specified. Yet a man does not incur the most terrible of punishments for only *half* a murder.

Wasted
Ingenuity.

Not alone would Jasper's character be spoilt. Helena Landless would be lost—she must either be somebody important or nobody at all. If she had no mission, the careful limning of her character in such strong lines, showing her fitness for that mission, was vain and ridiculous. There was no need to prove her capacity if her capacity was never to be tested.

If, too, Edwin Drood survived, never did a more superfluous character lag upon the stage. He had never been loved in the truest sense by Rosa, nor had he truly loved Rosa

in return. To make him utterly impossible as a future husband Tartar was introduced, and a returned Edwin, superseded, would prove, at least, embarrassing.

But Dickens was not guilty of such bad art. The whole story shows what a consummate artist he had become. If his revelations were forcible and vivid, his concealment and repression were not the less significant. No character, displayed so strikingly on occasion, is yet kept more in the background than Helena Landless. The The Master hand. superbness of the effort is realized when we perceive the success of the author in at once convincing us of Helena's greatness and yet withdrawing her from view and causing her at times to be almost forgotten. She was in reserve—the mighty force ready to operate, but hidden until the exact moment arrived for a crushing action.

In judging Dickens as a plot-maker we must not lose sight of this repression, this extraordinary demand upon his self-restraint. It is easier to reveal than to conceal, but

he was compelled by the nature of his plans to prevent Helena from being seen or heard. Yet, when we have seized the clue, how much stronger it becomes as we realize this hidden strand in it! We suddenly discern why Jasper and Helena, though moving in so small a circle, are kept apart; or rather, why they meet only once, and why at that early meeting the note of hostility, of an inexpugnable antagonism, is immediately struck. The sound of the note lingers through the story—yet they met no more, never spoke to each other again. All the same the author had achieved his purpose. So thoroughly had he achieved it, that we are able to see with conviction that although Jasper had forgotten the exact sound of her voice, he would realize in that crucial moment when he was to confront her again that Helena, and none other, was the destined Avenger, and that she typified the secret inexorable Fate that dogs the murderer to his doom. This is the supreme triumph of Dickens. The idea once caught, however faintly,

grows in power and centres itself amid manifold lights. There are still secrets scarcely to be guessed at; there are still possibilities in diverse directions. Only the master-hand could have finished this master-work; only the designer of the master-key could have opened the baffling and triple-guarded lock.

We read *Edwin Drood* under disadvantages, but every succeeding reading, every "loving study" of it, deepen the conviction that it had all the charm and mellow radiance of a sunset which follows and perfects a day of unflinching light.

PART II
THE ETHICAL PHASES

CHAPTER THE FIRST

HIS IDEALS OF MANHOOD

(a) *Heroes.*

WHEN Dickens began to write, the reign of the dandies was rapidly drawing to a close. The latter part of the eighteenth century was largely artificial, and the ideals of manhood and womanhood needed reconstituting. Drawing-room exquisites and city fops had strutted on the stage, and languishing young women had been expected to adore them. The Georgian era had over-emphasized costumes and ceremonies, lace handkerchiefs and ornamental snuff-boxes, powder and puff; and a species of glittering snobbery prevailed. No doubt there were brave and chivalrous men and sincere and thoughtful women. But the general tone was low. Routs and Clubs set a vicious fashion. Literature reflected the manners of

the time, and while the conventional hero was swaggering and licentious, the conventional heroine was docile and doll-like, a plaything to receive extravagant addresses when wooed, and to be accounted little above the domestic servant when won. The objects of the most ardent raptures were not accounted fit to join in the banquets of their lords; they shared few confidences, were granted few liberties, and were expected to be little more than simpering and affected inanities.

Sham
Gentility.

Into this degenerate age Dickens came, a child of the people, with a hatred of shams, and a new message for both men and women. He brought with him a vivifying spirit. His initial task was to laugh away the tawdry romance and the tinsel sentiment of bepowdered coxcombs and bepatched nymphs. Dandyism was to give way to robustness—to a manhood more rational and less designing, with capacity for better work than dawdling and pirouetting, with a nobler motive than ogling and lady-killing, with deeper feeling than was conveyed in pro-

testations of mighty passions, and with ambitions which went beyond the achievement of a reputation for curled whiskers and fancy waistcoats. Dickens had no love for "the good old times" for which the red-faced friend of Mr. Alderman Cute pined—"the good old times, the grand old times, the great old times," when—crowning glory!—you could, by looking in Strutt's Costumes, "see what a Porter used to be!"

He began his satire at once, and stimulated a healthy reaction against the gaudy and decadent age by ridiculing the typical hero, whether a Grandison or a Roderick Random, a sighing Strephon or an Alonzo the Brave. The curate who "parted his hair on the centre of his forehead in the form of a Norman arch, wore a brilliant of the first water on the fourth finger of his left hand (which he always applied to his left cheek when he read the prayers), and had a deep sepulchral voice of unusual solemnity" was, by the youthful Boz, as determinedly satirized as the dapper draper's assistant, posing

as the man of mystery, who, "with the black whiskers and the white cravat, with his hair brushed off his forehead, his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and in a contemplative attitude, suggested Lord Byron." The parson who made the young ladies melancholy with religion, Horatio Sparkins who was the most gentleman-like man ever seen, the Tuggs's who came into money and resolved to be fashionable even to the extent of spelling Simon with a C, and ceasing to eat pickled salmon with a pocket-knife—these and many more, representative of foppery and false gentility, were the immediate victims of the young crusader's ridicule. Too long had they been endured, and too long had they been a vogue throughout those decades when the favourite interjection was "La!" and the most over-worked adjective was "Genteel."

These are the mean types. They reappear in various guises many times in Dickens's books. He was more severe with the coarser specimens of the same age, and there is something ruthless and scathing in his depic-

tion of the semi-savage Sir Mulberry Hawk and of his reptile creatures Pike and Pluck.

The earliest of Dickens's stories and novels mark his entire and emphatic renunciation of the old models. He wanted no namby-pamby paragons for heroes, no gallant but conscienceless adventurers, no peerless knights, and no romantic fairy princes. And herein lies a peculiar charm, herein is found a new strength, in the Dickens story. Not only is the "hero" short of perfection; he is frequently subordinate. To the readers of those days it must have been strange to bewilderment, a veritable paradox, that the "hero" should be unheroic or that he should be a minor character. Dickens was quite aware of what he was doing, and from the first had made definite plans. "If Nicholas Nickleby," he wrote, "be not always found to be blameless or agreeable, he is not always intended to appear so. He is a young man of an impetuous temper and of little or no experience; and I saw no reason why such a hero should be lifted out of nature."

Books lacking
"Heroes."

We can detect yet another phenomenon—some of the novels, though they introduce male characters of importance, have no "hero" at all. There is no hero in *Oliver Twist*, no hero in *Barnaby Rudge*, no hero in *Bleak House*, no hero in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, no hero in *Dombey and Son*, no hero in *Hard Times*, no hero in *The Christmas Carol*. Faintly enough is the hero adumbrated in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and the picture is quite eclipsed. It has been denied—and there is argument for it—that David Copperfield is the hero of his eponymous story; and Arthur Clennam is overshadowed by Little Dorrit.

A Change in
Fashion.

I am disposed to think that, apart from the somewhat stagey Nicholas Nickleby, there are only two men in all Dickens's works who thoroughly conform to the old-fashioned standard of the hero, occupying a central and dominating position, and around whom all events revolve—Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and John Rokesmith in *Our Mutual Friend*. Dickens deliberately

changed the pattern, and thereby showed his wisdom. For what was the olden idea? Merely that the hero should be young, handsome, faultless; that, despite his youth, his should be the chief adventures, and his all the wisdom; that, despite the limited interest of so short a life, attention should be concentrated upon his fate.

This stock figure is a palpable absurdity. His marriage or death could never be a main issue if, as Dickens put it, there was no "lifting out of nature." The world has progressed since Edwin's union to Angelina was an all-absorbing problem, but Dickens in his day was almost single-handed fighting the tradition of centuries. He was the first to dispense with Orlando, and to heighten the interest in Jaques. There are deeper roots in humanity than a young man's fancies strike; there are questions more urgently clamorous of solution than the course of true love. Granting to human affection all its importance and all its influence on destiny, we may still urge that marriage more often

marks the rising of the curtain on the real drama of life than it betokens the fall of the curtain upon a completion. We cannot be fobbed off with phrases from fairy-tales of "living happy ever after"—three-parts of life dismissed in a generalization. It is true that Dickens loved the "happy ending" and was by no means averse from the easy-going platitude. But between the beginning and the end of his love-story—sometimes the thinnest of threads—he gave us the pulsating and momentous verities, the deep and searching problems, the philosophy and the hard fact, the cunning comedy and the throbbing tragedy—beside all which the fine-spun love-tale was but a spider-skein.

Tradition was against Dickens and example was opposed to him. But he mapped out his scheme and was resolute in his aim because he was not the dreamer but the realist. In the old romances were the flimsy models; in the early novels the lay-figures. Dickens himself had occasional relapses, and fell back on copy-book vacui-

ties. There is too much Sunday-school goodness about Walter Gay and Kit Nubbles; there is bathos rather than pathos in Sloppy and Jenny Wren; and that virtuous youth Harry Maylie excites nothing but nausea. I wish Clennam had had more devil in him, and Rokesmith a redeeming vice; and as for Mr. Edward Chester, I find myself profanely believing it would have been better for *Barnaby Rudge* had he never been born. These are some of the failures, so few as to leave us the more amazed at the extent of the bead-roll of the successes.

The aim of Dickens was to deal with men, not puppets—men as he found them, as he knew them, as he understood them; men who walked the solid earth; not men who roamed imaginary empyreans, not men of poetical conception, and not men of an ideal realm. He wanted no spiritual Galahads. The best, classify them as you will, cannot be quite free from fault. All the more close to us, and perhaps none the less admired, are those impetuous, wrong-headed, blundering, and

Virtue in
Homespun

hot-blooded fellow-creatures, whose fine grain shows through a coarse texture, whose grace is in deeds and not in elegant speech, and whose true gold shines forth with added splendour for the sober and unpretentious nature in contrast with it.

"Moulded out
of Faults."

Dickens dared to do what no author had dared to do before, give touches of grotesqueness to his "gentlemen." Good conduct and bad grammar; irreproachable motives and awkward habits; untainted minds and grimy faces;—he delighted in such juxtapositions. We must laugh as well as admire—laugh at Ham Peggotty whose trousers were so stiff that they could have stood alone, and who did not exactly wear a hat, but was covered in a-top like an old building, with something pitchy;—laugh at Captain Cuttle with his handkerchief twisted round his neck like a rope, a large shirt-collar like a small sail, and a glazed hat so hard that it made your very head ache to look at it;—laugh at Joe Gargery making extraordinary play with his hat as it toppled on

the table, now rushing at it and catching it neatly, now stopping it midway, holding it up, and humouring it, and finally splashing it into the slop-basin.

Which of the men deteriorates because Dickens touched so lightly and so amusingly upon foibles, petty vanities, and idiosyncrasies? Yet what other author raised a laugh against his own heroes? The good humour of Dickens played about his favourite subjects, and the more tender and beautiful they were the more he reconciled them to us by these intimate, but never derogatory, revelations. He had a relish for life, and his men must be men. So he defied tradition, flouted precedent, and rebelled against literary law. *Exit Valancourt!*

In this work he was unconsciously giving a special significance to William Hazlitt's lament that the heroes of romance are insipid. Why should it have been so? Because, said the penetrating essayist, it was taken for granted that they must be amiable and interesting, that they had only to show

themselves to ensure conquest, that all obstacles were to vanish without a finger being lifted; in short, that they were to do nothing, and yet to have the credit of all achievement. Dickens dissented and revolted; and in so doing not only changed the art of novel-writing but enlarged and uplifted the purpose of the novelist.

**The Position
of the Hero.**

The "hero" in Dickens's novels is proportioned to his surroundings. He is a link in the chain of associates and companions, and can attract with a lustre of his own; yet any one of the associates may vie with him in interest, excel him in achievement, or become pre-eminent in the magnitude of his influence and operation. The early novelists invited readers to concentrate attention on the issue—whether Lovelace would deserve Clarissa, whether Tom Jones would win Sophia, or whether Roderick Random would be happy with Narcissa. Jane Austen and even Thackeray, though with more delicacy, often insisted upon similar tea-cup problems. But turn to Dickens, and though

your attention be directed to such matters it is far from being absorbed by them. It is of small consequence if Nicholas Nickleby marry Madeleine Bray, but of commanding importance that Squeers's career be wrecked; it is almost immaterial whether or not young Martin Chuzzlewit be reunited to Mary Graham, but vital that Pecksniff shall be exposed. With this broadening of the novel, this frank recognition of the larger problems of life, this higher conception of human destiny, this subordination of individual interests, and this grappling with crucial principles, the stock hero of romance was bound to disappear.

A new duty was imposed upon the novelist. Dickens, in abandoning the old imperfect models, was compelled to create new types. The hero was not the chief actor, and the "gentleman" was to be found elsewhere than in the class which enjoys independent incomes and inherits vast estates. We are plunged into the world of common-sense and everyday fact, where a Joe Willett

has to enlist, a Tom Pinch is thrown out of work, and a Martin Chuzzlewit frequents the pawnshop and travels steerage. In addition to such experiences, the nominal hero also has an objective which must have seemed passing strange—a Copperfield seeking fame, a Rokesmith combating sordid vice. Still the hero was no ideal man. Some of those which are most endeared to us lack culture and refinement. Ham Peggotty thought his Christian name part of the verb “to be,” and Joe Gargery doubted whether the initial “J” stood for Joseph or George. Thus we reach, in Dickens’s novels, an absolutely new phase, a revolution, when the all-commanding hero of tradition dwindles, and the place he occupied is taken by men of deeper quality, larger action, and more marked character.

No Classic
Perfection.

When, therefore, we search for the real Dickens hero we must turn into the by-ways where we encounter figures which at first may appear to be wholly unheroic. In the vision which rises before us of those char-

acters most lovingly limned, there are few elegant or even gainly in form, and none of classic perfection. We have the pure mind that makes the body rich, and we detect the benign influence emanating from natures consecrated to good. In place of the glitter and gallantry of Orsini and Brummell, we may find only “an awkward-looking man, Tom Pinch. extremely short-sighted, and prematurely bald, dressed in a snuff-coloured suit of an uncouth make, which, being shrunk with long wear, is twisted and tortured in all kinds of odd shapes—a clumsy figure, with a great stoop in the shoulders, and a ludicrous habit of thrusting his head forward.”

Or, we may perceive a “mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going fellow, a fair man with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such undecided blue that they seem to have somehow got mixed with their own whites”; Gargery. and we shall see him helping a little ill-used lad to an extra spoonful of gravy as an act of silent sympathy, or waiting tenderly on a

vixenish wife and patiently bearing her shrewish complaints; and we shall hear him saying to one who could not understand his simple manliness and dignity—"You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer in my hand, or even my pipe. You won't find half so much fault in me if, supposing you should ever wish to see me, you come and put your head in at the forge window and see Joe the blacksmith there, at the old anvil, in the old burnt apron, sticking to the old work." And as he speaks these words the lad to whom they were addressed is compelled to utter his inmost thought—"The fashion of his dress could no more come in the way of his simple dignity than it could come in its way in Heaven."

In the vision we may pick out from the group one other figure—a man with a grizzled head and a rubicund face, an old man who went searching for a lost girl, a man full of kindness, tenderness, and native chivalry—an old rough fisherman with a heart of gold,

who bore patiently with a fractious woman, who played with a little child; one who said at the crisis of his life—"I'm a-going to seek my Em'ly. . . . I'm a-going to seek my niece through the wureld. I'm a-going to find my poor niece in her shame, and bring her back. No one stop me! I tell you I'm a-going to seek my niece. . . . Every night, as reg'lar as the night comes, the candle must be stood in its old pane of glass, that if ever she should see it, it may seem to say—'Come back, my child, come back.' . . . Many a time in my sleep I raise her up and whisper to her—'Em'ly, my dear, I am come fur to bring forgiveness and to take you home.' . . . If I don't find her, maybe she'll come to hear, sometime, as her loving uncle only ended his search when he ended his life."

Dan'l
Peggotty.

These three, among many; these real heroes, these gentlemen;—a man with a stoop, a man in his old burnt apron, and a grizzled fisherman with a husky voice. But they form part of a vision of noble manhood, of untainted nature, good creatures as

God fashioned them: Tom Pinch, Joe Gargery, and Dan'l Peggotty. Men worthy of that name. Gentlemen, modest and exalted. Heroes, not of high adventure, but of sterling worth, innate goodness; heroes, not handsome, save in deeds that make them so.

(b) *Gentlemen.*

When Dickens died in 1870 a then popular essayist deemed it discerning to declare: "He had not the gift of drawing any noble woman, or any true-hearted gentleman. A Colonel Newcome or an Uncle Toby was miles beyond his reach." Ever since that time the cageful of human parrots, loving an easy phrase, has cawed with weary iteration—"Dickens couldn't describe a gentleman." Fault-finders have saved themselves the trouble of thinking by repeating second-hand—"He couldn't describe a gentleman." Small critics, eager to appear original, have shrieked—"He couldn't describe a gentle-

man." If these wise souls were looking for divinities in well-starched linen, who parted their hair precisely down the middle, who uttered the choicest English, and who inspired admiration at sight, then their dictum is beyond dispute. Dickens never did describe such gentlemen, and never wanted to. But he gave us the portrait of a poor Carrier who, thinking the wife he loved was weary of him, said out of the greatness of his heart—"I mean to do her the greatest kindness, and make her the best reparation in my power. I can release her from the daily pain of an unequal marriage, and the struggle to conceal it. She shall be as free as I can render her. . . . Let her go, with my blessing for the many happy hours she has given me, and my forgiveness for the pang she has caused me. Let her go, and have the peace of mind I wish her"—and I proclaim John Peerybingle, transcendently self-sacrificing, a gentleman.¹

"Not Wealth,
but Soul."

¹ See Thackeray's defence in the "Roundabout Papers"
—*De Juventute*.

Toodle, the poor engine-driver, with his delicate act of sympathy for bereaved Mr. Dombey, was a gentleman; Mr. Twemlow, helpful and disinterested in the midst of an intriguing multitude, was a gentleman; John Jarndyce, diffident and chivalrous, was a gentleman. Dickens had an unerring instinct as to what constituted "the gentleman at heart and the gentleman in manner"; he was not to be deceived by powder, polish, and perfumery; he was not misled by arrogant pretension; and he knew the true gentleman was revealed, not by outward gilt, but by inner graces. He could convey the conviction to his readers that broken-down Newman Noggs and the school-drudge Mr. Mell were both gentlemen, such as the parvenu Veneering and the posturing Turveydrop could never be.

The truth is that Dickens had his own point of view on this subject, and was most careful to explain the difference between true and false gentility. The moral is impressively enforced in that pathetic in-

When
Steerforth fell.

cident which discloses how the rich and pampered boy Steerforth strove to humiliate the downtrodden usher at Creakle's school. Mr. Mell's offence was that he visited and consoled his pauper mother. So when he bade Steerforth behave, the privileged youth by an act of defiance exhibited his contempt; and Mr. Mell, laying a hand on David Copperfield's head, begged Steerforth with a trembling lip not to use his position to "insult a gentleman." "A what? Where is he?" sneered the youth. A cry of "Shame" came from that low lad, Traddles; but Mr. Creakle, recognizing only the rights of wealth, promptly dismissed Mell, caned Traddles, and thanked Steerforth for "asserting the independence and respectability of the school." The episode is revealing. Creakle, casting a final jibe at Mell and shaking hands with Steerforth, is exactly the sort of man who would have agreed that Dickens could not describe a "gentleman."

Dickens adhered to the fine old creed that "manners makyth man," and he knew it was

Nature's
Noblemen.

intrinsic worth, and not the setting, which gives the jewel place and value. Caleb Plummer, living with his blind daughter in a cracked nutshell of a wooden house, like a pimple on the prominent red-brick nose of Gruff and Tackleton's premises; Caleb Plummer, with his scanty grey hair and in his sackcloth garment; Caleb Plummer, humming his song with an aching heart, and treading lightly and courageously despite his burden of cares and age;—Caleb Plummer, by every test and token, was a gentleman, the incarnation of unselfishness. The poor drudge waved a fairy wand that the afflicted girl could live in a realm of happy illusion; the slave made his very chains a source of mirth, and pictured the home of blotched walls, and mouldering beams, and rotting wood, and rusted iron, as an enchanted abode.

Dickens loved to contemplate these self-effacing characters, the Plummers, the R. Wilfers, and the Prince Turveydrops; he held them up to honour, for they were his

Sidneys, his real men, his heroes in homespun. Pip "wanted to be a gentleman," and misconceived what it meant. *Great Expectations* is a sermon and a warning against the error, a tragic lesson on the hideous abuse of that term which is soiled by all ignoble use. Turveydrop Senior, the vulgarian who aped gentility, is nothing but a scarecrow, designed by Dickens to affright us from arrant imposture.

It is in such a delineation as this, ruthless and inexorable, that we discover how deliberately Dickens set himself to distinguish between truth and frippery. He knocked to pieces the padded and painted phantasm of a "gentleman" whose heart was corrupt though his deportment was faultless. "A very gentlemanly man indeed," we are told, "with a false complexion, false teeth, false whiskers, and a wig. He had a fur collar, and he had a padded breast to his coat, which only wanted a star or a broad blue ribbon to be complete. He was pinched in, and swelled out, and got up, and strapped down,

The Degraded
Type

as much as he could possibly bear. . . . He had, under his arm, a hat of great size and weight, shelving downward from the crown to the brim, and in his hands a pair of white gloves, with which he flapped it, as he stood poised on one leg, in a high-shouldered, round-elbowed state of elegance not to be surpassed. He had a cane, he had an eye-glass, he had a snuff-box, he had rings, he had wristbands, he had everything but any touch of nature; he was not like youth, he was not like age, he was not like anything in the world but a model of Deportment."

Note the unerring finger upon the defect in all Grandisonian models—"not a touch of nature!" And from this portentous poltroon, this mass of artificiality, come affectation, insincerity, showiness, and guile, worthy of a fashion-block garnished and tricked-out, though his kin could go shabby and thread-bare, though his son could pay for his lodging, and though his wife could labour whilst he lounged. "England," quoth this monstrosity, "has degenerated. She has

His Ideals of Manhood 129

not many gentlemen left. We are few. I see nothing to succeed us but a race of weavers." "It is impossible to say," he observed on another occasion, "how long the last feeble traces of gentlemanly Deportment may linger in this weaving and spinning age. But so long I will do my duty to society, and will show myself as usual about town." A trained and frock-coated gorilla would probably take the same view, and as much deserve to be thought a gentleman.

Once again judging Dickens's likes by his dislikes, his intuitive knowledge of what was admirable in manhood by his scathing satire of what was despicable, we turn from the Turveydrop imposture to the Veneering illusion. The whited sepulchre is apparent from the first, ghastly in its speciousness. Everything about the Veneerings, we learn, was spick and span new. "All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were

Surface
Splendo

new, they themselves were new, and they were as newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a bran-new baby. . . . All things were in a high state of varnish and polish. And what was observable in the furniture was observable in the Veneerings—the surface smelt a little too much of the workshop and was a trifle sticky.” Veneer neither created the gentleman nor gave him substance; but before the resounding smash came Veneering had gathered around him others who lived equally on false credit and paraded in fine plumage.

Alfred Lammle, with “too much nose in his face, too much ginger in his whiskers, too much torso in his waistcoat, too much sparkle in his studs, his eyes, his buttons, his talk, his teeth,” was one of these—a common adventurer, a designing rogue, but very much of a gentleman until the veneer was removed. Fascination Fledgeby was another—the young man with the peachy cheek, sandy-haired, small-eyed, slim to lankiness, and prone to self-examination of whisker and

moustache. The veneer scaled from him also, and revealed the tyrant, the bully, and the extortioner; and no more a gentleman than the pickpocket or the highway robber, no more a gentleman than Montague Tigg when he became Tigg Montague with jet-black shining hair, and symmetrical clothes of the newest fashion and the costliest kind. What a gentleman of the old showy school he would have made! Even Lothair might have envied him. "Flowers of gold and blue, and green and blushing red, were on his waistcoat; precious chains and jewels sparkled on his breast; his fingers, clogged with brilliant rings, were as summer flies but newly rescued from a honey-pot!" Dickens had nothing but contempt for the ostentation and oriental magnificence of these petty-minded showmen.

"Gentlemen," forsooth! He supplied every sign by which we could detect the cheat, the deceiving or self-deceived slave who was *not* a gentleman; he pierced the weakness, exposed the luring sophistry, and

held up to endless ridicule, scorn, and contempt the base, the vulgar, the worthless who tried to impose themselves on the world as sterling gold. We judge his likes by his dislikes, we judge what he would praise by that which he blamed. We judge where his honour was given by that which he held up to censure and reproach. He denounced the counterfeit; he recognized merit. He knew the true gentleman.

Impossible
Paragons.

Artists have tried to portray on canvas their ideal of perfection. Dramatists have striven to imitate these artists with depictions of men and women of impossible excellence—

“The wonder of all time,
The phoenix of perfection,
So absolute in body and mind
That but to speak the least part to the height
Would ask an angel’s tongue, and yet then end
In silent admiration.”

Novelists have peopled their domain with such paragons, “the faultless monsters that the world ne’er saw,” all unreal, all untrue to nature. These waxen images never lived;

these gilded gods never breathed. Did Dickens stumble into error? In his early days he was tempted. A youth who had fed his imagination on *The Arabian Nights* and had surfeited himself with the early romances and the first novels, found it difficult to descend at once to the commonplaces of nature. There are traces of an evil influence upon Dickens in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist*, but they serve only to show the struggle he made to liberate himself and to become a realist, a student of man as designed by nature and not as pictured by fancy, man lower than the angels and acting his part in the age and the world to which he belonged.

Doubtless Dickens thought, as others had thought, that an ideal man was a man idealized. He came to learn that the idealization passes out of recognition. So he turned to the true man with his blemishes and his redeeming worth, with his failings and his lofty purpose, with his weakness and his fine spirit. His gentlemen conform to the

Men and
Motives.

standard prescribed by Hazlitt—"a refined humanity, a spirit delicate in itself, and unwilling to offend either in the greatest or the smallest things. This may be coupled with ignorance of forms and frequent blunders. But the will is good. The spring of gentle offices and true regards is untainted. He gives the wall to the beggar, but he does not always bow to great men." Judged by such a definition Nicodemus Boffin was a gentleman as surely as was John Jarndyce, Mark Tapley as surely as Tom Pinch, and Old Humphrey as surely as Gabriel Varden. Mr. Garland who befriended Kit Nubbles, Mr. Brownlow who protected Oliver Twist, Mr. Jarvis Lorry who tended the distressed women during the Revolution, and Mr. Pickwick who took the thin wasted hand of Jingle in the Fleet, were all gentlemen. And, being gentlemen, they were as unlike as possible Chester the dandy, who was punctiliously polite, who lived in the aroma of choice perfumes, who dressed in exquisite taste, and who turned his son from his door and left

Maypole Hugh to perish on the scaffold. The Rev. Frank Milvey, wretchedly paid, teaching and translating the classics to eke out his scanty means, and yet finding time for the poor and wretched, was a gentleman; so was the Rev. Septimus Crisparkle, Dean of Cloisterham, befriending a wayward youth, rebuking a bully, acting the peacemaker, the while "soft-hearted benevolence beamed from his boxing-gloves."

Dickens "could not describe a gentleman"! Let us be sure we have a proper conception of what a gentleman is before we send the slander on its rounds again.

As the final and triumphant test I turn to John Jarndyce, simple, diffident, a trifle crotchety, absolutely noble. One incident suffices: his offer of marriage to Esther Summerson. She was a child of shame and needed a protector. She was poor, and he was rich. She had lost her beauty by the scars of a dread disease. And at this crisis John Jarndyce offered her an assured posi-

A Pattern
Gentleman

tion as his wife. Delicately, modestly, he sent her a letter.

“It was not a love letter, though it expressed so much love, but was written just as he would at any time have spoken to me. I saw his face, and heard his voice, and felt the influence of his kind protecting manner, in every line. It addressed me as if our places were reversed; as if all the good deeds had been mine, and all the feelings they had awakened, his. It dwelt on my being young, and he past the prime of life; on his having attained a ripe age, while I was a child; on his writing to me with a silvered head, and knowing all this so well as to set it before me for mature deliberation. He told me that I would gain nothing by such a marriage, and lose nothing by rejecting it. . . . I was always to remember that I owed him nothing, and that he was my debtor.”

The splendour, the sacredness, and the heroism of it! To confer a favour while seeming to ask for one, to ascribe all goodness to others and claim none for himself, to be self-denying that others may gain, to omit mention of his own merit and to be silent on the shortcomings of a friend, to give service

and ask no return: these are the insignia of perfect knighthood, these are the credentials of the gentleman.

Taking mentally in review the scope of Dickens's genius, we may see, as one sees the pinnacles in a mountain-range, the clear and unmistakable elevations which he intended for the supreme types of man. A closer examination enables us to perceive something of his plan and purpose. He cast aside the abased in spirit, the vain pretender, the self-lauding hypocrite, and the vulgar charlatan; and he admitted only to sovereign state the man of merit, magnanimity, and largeness of heart, his quality revealed by deeds, his attributes by exalted motives, and his adornments by inner graces. To expose the meretricious in its spurious disguises, and to display the sincere whether in the garb of the peer or the gaberdine of the beggar, formed a main part of the settled design.

His portraits are illuminating as lessons and potent as morals. Dickens excites contempt for the worthless and distorted, and

The Meaning
and the Model.

strips the mask from imposture; he demands admiration for worth however humble and obscure. The characters are often made to serve as foils to each other, the base metal contrasted with honest gold. He leaves to his readers the choice—the trickster and time-server or the man of conscience, uprightness and inbred courtesy; Pumblechook or Gargery, Pecksniff or Pinch, Turveydrop or Jarndyce; honourable nature or contraband goods. Lump together the vices and weaknesses of the one class, the virtues and powers of the other, and you have the individuality which Dickens hated, the individuality he held in esteem. He described no good men as saints; they are just our human kin, approachable, on a high level possible of attainment. The hero is not a marble statue, but a fellow-creature with palpitating heart, with emotions like our own, with sorrows and joys, with cares and hopes. Every one may enter this Order of Knighthood, and find his place at the Round Table to which good deeds and righteous aspirations are the only passports,

CHAPTER THE SECOND

HIS IDEALS OF WOMANHOOD

(a) *Heroines.*

THE study of the women in Dickens's novels is the study of a development and almost of a revolution in his own ideas. Ardent and romantic by nature, and with an early love-passion of his own which deeply influenced his thoughts, he began, as do most young men, with dreams more than realities, with etherealizations rather than flesh and blood. As he matured and became more practical he abandoned visions and substituted human life. He even learnt to laugh at himself, and to ridicule the phantom figures and the inchoate inanities which had been the intangible creations of his imagination. Better still, he gradually approached an ideal none the less winsome because less wondrous, and none the less worthy because

less elusive. We trace his sure and certain progress to a wise conclusion; we discover what qualities he preferred in womanhood, and on what basic principles he founded his noblest types. His enlargement of view, his emancipation from the fettering conditions with which he began, and his final conception, mark the definite stages in his progress. The more completely to understand this and to do him honour, it is necessary to observe initial failures, and to contrast the first crude experiments with the later designs.

**The Vogue of
Insipidity.**

As in the case of his men, Dickens, in treating of women, followed false guides and imitated bad models. In pre-Victorian literature the heroes were active and the heroines passive, the men wrought and the women were docile, the knights engaged in tournaments and the dames rewarded them with smiles. There was little need to individualize those who had so obscure a part in the drama. Demands of art were satisfied by representing the women as invariably beautiful beyond words and faithful beyond

reason. It is true that sanest genius turned from such dull assumptions, and Ruskin has boldly affirmed in *Sesame and Lilies* that Shakespeare had no heroes, only heroines. But it was not so with Chaucer or Malory and the romantic and lyrical schools—when they spoke of the supreme beauty of Phyllida, the patience of Griselda, the devotion of Elaine, or the abstract virtues of Constantia (artificial labels on fashion-plate figures), they had done justice to woman and paid her full tribute. They affected to elevate her upon a pedestal, but they only put there a statuette, not a being with mind and soul.

To this poor heritage the first novelists succeeded. Smollett crowded his stage with recognizable men and undefined women. The men live and stir; the women are simply onlookers. The position is wholly false if not cruel. These simpering insipidities exist for no purpose but the delight of man, and the last vestige of interest evaporates with marriage. The conventional

heroine was described much as an extravagant enthusiast might catalogue the good points in the queen of the poultry-yard. Fielding, except in *Amelia*, advanced little beyond this debased standard. The powers of the early authors were reserved for men and for those women who were *not* heroines and therefore did not consist mainly of wax-work and sawdust.

Need for New
Types.

In this school the nineteenth-century writers were trained, or, rather, from this school they derived precedent and tradition. We see the effects not only in Dickens, but in Thackeray, Lytton, and Jane Austen, though in each instance there are signs also of a desperate attempt to break away. George Eliot, coming later, found a new order of heroine in course of evolution, and being herself strong-minded was able to carve clear-cut and vigorous personalities. But to Dickens such a task was hardest of all, for his mind was saturated with *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*; yet the truth was soon to dawn upon him that milk-and-water

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beauties who stitched samplers, sang ballads, and swooned on the slightest provocation, were not exactly suited for the purpose he had in view. Robust men could not be harmonized with hazy unsubstantialities. Dickens realized that the marionette was wasted in his dramas, and that women must have animation, potentiality, inspiration; in other words, possess distinct identity, stand out sharply characterized, be endued with force and activity. For the first time in our prose literature he proportioned the woman to the man.

But again the task was made hard by certain of his own propensities. His peculiar power lay, not in precision of artistic detail essential to accurate portraiture, but in the free and dexterous strokes of humorous exaggeration indicative of the caricaturist. He favoured the grotesque, whether in man or woman. Burlesque and cartooning were more natural to him than delicate limning. He had no interest in the ordinary; he had scant patience with stock figures; he could

Caricature, not
Character.

expend no pains, exercise no originality, on those familiar faces where the nose was aquiline, the complexion clear, and the mouth of specified dimensions. His eye was keen for the abnormal and for eccentricities; and customary heroines could only be according to pattern. Dickens lingered over Mrs. Gamp and Charity Pecksniff; he lavished a joyous pride on Mrs. Wilfer, Mrs. Nickleby, Mrs. Pardiggle, Mrs. Varden, and Mrs. Snagsby; he added exquisite and subtle touches to their portraiture until we know every turn and twist in the expressive features; but how could he find scope for his art in Mary Graham, or Madeleine Bray, or Rose Maylie? What do we know of Arabella Allen beyond her dark eyes and neat ankles? How indifferent he could be even with Ada Clare; and how careless with Emma Haredale. Dickens, in short, was fighting against himself when he depicted great and noble types of women as heroines. At first he seemed barely conscious of the obligation, but when he had once realized it

he set himself patiently and manfully to fulfil it. So his record is strange and wayward, with a bad beginning, improvement, great attainments, and sudden fluctuations and relapses.

Fielding, perhaps, wrote with his tongue in his cheek, when he introduced a heroine with the fatuous apostrophe—"Lo, adorned with all the charms in which nature can array her, bedecked with beauty, youth, sprightliness, innocence, modesty and tenderness, breathing sweetness from her rosy lips, and darting brightness from her sparkling eyes, the lovely Sophia comes"; but Dickens was evidently quite in earnest when he imitated the extravagance in *Nicholas Nickleby*, and perchance deemed it sublime to say of Madeleine Bray—"There are no words which can express, nothing which can be compared to, the perfect pallor, the clear transparent whiteness, of the beautiful face," with much more in the same strain. We scarcely marvel at the effect on Nicholas, and can easily credit that "there was some-

The Worst
Form of
Flattery.

thing in the face which quite unmanned him," for the reader suffers a similar affliction. It is as contemptible as a modern picture-postcard of a smiling sixth-rate actress.

Fading
Ethereality.

The high-flown descriptions defeat their own purpose, because they are unreal. They doubly defeat their purpose because they deal only with the countenance, and ignore the mind. Dickens failed. His triumph was that he comprehended his failure. We can imagine him shaking with laughter in after years when he thought of his boyish heroics, and of the unmitigated bathos of that melodramatic scene when Nicholas "took his beautiful burden in his arms and rushed violently out into the street," unquestionably to the surprise of the passers-by. But it was all in accord with precedent, when insight into a woman's character was deemed unnecessary, when her conversation only consisted of distracted fragments, and when her tears were far more in evidence than her intelligence. We close the book and remember grotesque Vincent Crummles and the

ugly materiality of Squeers; but the incomparably beautiful Madeleine sinks back into the shadowland from which she dimly emerged.

Compare the bread-and-butter Kate Nickleby with Mrs. Kenwigs, and observe how differently Dickens wields the pen when Woman's Mission. dealing with artificial types and with definite characters. He was awkward, uneasy, and unconvincing, and his trashy paragons no more impress us than the gentle shepherdesses of the fribbling versifiers. Dickens had to come to his own rescue, and to drag himself out of a deadly groove. He had the instinct to perceive that woman in real life plays a paramount part in man's destiny. He recognized her functions, her capacity. He saw that if she be subordinate she need not be inferior; if less active she need not be complacent. The new heroine in fiction was evolved, not less attractive because less futile, not less to be revered because of quickened intellect, or because she manifested will, initiative, and power.

The Law of
Evolution.

The first three novels are haunted with phantasms. The most impalpable and the most irritating of all is Rose Maylie, "in the lovely bloom and spring-time of womanhood," and "at that age when, if ever angels be for good purposes enthroned in mortal forms they may be suffered to abide in such as hers." The dictionary is ransacked for adjectives to do her justice. "Cast in so slight and exquisite a mould; so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful that earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions"—etcetera. Beaumont and Fletcher's Ordella was scarcely comparable to this phoenix. But not a single achievement of any note was placed to the credit of the more than mortal being, this angel enthroned in mortal form, this glass-case specimen of faultlessness and fatuity. The juvenility of it all is pitiful.

But when we come to Dolly Varden, in the succeeding volume, the transformation is amazing. She was Dickens's first heroine who was human—human in her bright,

endearing ways, in her capricious moods, in her spoilt-child temper, and in her tender compensations. Yet, if a heroine should have a mission, as I believe, Dolly Varden, too, is unsatisfactory; at most, she does but take us a step forward towards satisfaction. We are at all events brought face to face with nature in the "pretty laughing girl"; we have left the angel-presence and the rarefied atmosphere of inaccessible heights; and we can touch the hand and look into the eyes of Dolly Varden as she trips lightly along the road in her cherry-coloured mantle and with her ribbons fluttering in the light; we catch the very ripple of her laugh, and there is kinship with her. Dickens had now thrown down the porcelain goddess of classical perfection, and established something vital in her place. It was the beginning of a new dynasty, and in succession followed women growing in majesty and influence.

Time and thought had advanced, and Dickens adapted himself to new requirements. Happily, in his epoch-making

departure from the olden paths and the prescribed courses, he wrought no violence. He was enabled still to retain the fragrance of the bygone days, and his noblest heroines are not a new species or strange importations; they are transplantations from the past to the present. Prototypes of Esther and Agnes, of Little Dorrit and Florence Dombey, could be found in Fielding's gallery, but the vesture was changed, dignity was added to beauty, the charm was deepened, and the quality was enriched.

Womanly
Service.

Probably Dickens, with experience, found his personal views undergoing revision. The change was sharp and decided, and indicated more than a literary motive. A definite idea is conveyed of what the man himself believed to be the helpmeet, the complement to the hero. Physical charm was no longer placed foremost, nor was it painted with excess of colour. The women who delight do not dazzle; their fascination is not to eye but to heart; they allure, but the glamour lies in disposition, not in aspect. Above all, they

shape simply, naturally, and aptly into the scheme of things, and they are women of gracious ways and practical service. Practical service—that is the keynote to character. If, retaining the old fulsome terms, they are “divinities,” they are divinities of domesticity; if “angels,” angels in the house and by the hearthside; if “patterns,” patterns of order, governance, usefulness, and inspiration.

It was the “little woman” who became Dickens’s type of goodness and comfort. He almost made us admire a “dumpling” figure. Ruth Pinch, Esther Summerson, Dot Peerybingle, Dolly Varden, Milly Swidger, Mrs. Lirriper, Clemency Newcome, Mrs. Crisparkle, Polly Toodle, all “little” bundles of good nature, bring with them a sense of cosiness, and have tender ways, and are faithful in ~~ministration~~ ministrations. If they have but few cubits to their stature, and are of humble mind and even of lowly aim, yet there is force within them to compel others to daring deeds, to fortify ambition, and to draw out

The “Little” Series.

the latent strength from those they love. We feel their magnetism, and realize the fervency and intensity of their secret fires. They are "little," but neither weak nor irresolute, and their instinct is unerring. Where they are is content, and with small ambition for themselves they are a spur to effort and are participants in unselfish victories. For themselves it suffices that they be honourable wives and honoured mothers. Such was the ideal of womanhood which Dickens established. It may be contended that it was not exalted. Almost it ceased to be romantic. Yet there is not a man but would prefer Bella Wilfer in her common black dress to Zuleika in all her starry raiment and moonshine mystery.

(b) *Gentlewomen.*

Who stands foremost in the group? Many will say Ruth Pinch. Analyze her, and you find the material of which she is composed almost commonplace. But she is a lovable and endearing personality. A "little"

woman, with a sweet shy face and a gentle spirit; a "little" woman with childlike ways; a "little" woman of limited knowledge and contracted views; a "little" woman who can find infinite delight in cookery; a "little" woman who gives her care to a simple-minded brother; a "little" woman who is all friendliness, patient endurance, unselfish love: what minute ingredients, what atoms, and, in the mass, what a compact of virtue! Triviality is but a question of quality, and Ruth Pinch is pure gold, though in the smallest grains. She is one of a sisterhood which includes Dot Peerybingle and Milly Swidger, counteracting evil and diffusing joy. They banish blight and leave a blessing, reverse malignant spells, convert the Marahs of bitterness into sweet refreshment, restore broken friendships, and sanctify life. That is no low ideal of womanhood. Yet Ruth Pinch was but a drudging governess, Dot Peerybingle but the wife of a slow-witted carrier, and Milly Swidger but a servant in a house among humdrum and unrefined

people. Dickens gave them the fairy-touch and the angel-attributes without calling them either fairies or angels—just women, with womanly natures, the unconscious makers of the earthly paradise.

Mrs. Lirriper
—“Lady.”

In this sisterhood I would include a still humbler heroine, struggling and uneducated, a woman who jumbled her sentences, whose hands were roughened with toil, whose face was marred by years of grinding hardship; yet if purity of spirit, and self-sacrifice, and service, are of higher account than dainty fingers and Grecian features, Mrs. Lirriper, lodging-house keeper, claims admittance among the best. She is not a heroine in the customary sense, but she is one of those types of worthy womanhood whom Dickens loved to depict; and even in the pathos of a small incident, a sort of sublimity beams forth. I venture to quote it in her queer phraseology—

“‘My poor Lirriper,’ she said, ‘being behindhand with the world and being buried at Hatfield Church in Hertfordshire, not that

it was his native place but that he had a liking for the Salisbury Arms where we went upon our wedding day and passed as happy a fortnight as ever happy was, I went round to the creditors and I says—"Gentlemen, I am acquainted with the fact that I am not answerable for my late husband's debts, but I wish to pay them for I am his lawful wife and his good name is dear to me. I am going into the lodgings, gentlemen, as a business, and if I prosper every farthing that my late husband owed shall be paid for the sake of the love I bore him, by this right hand." It took a long time to do it but it was done, and the silver cream jug which is between ourselves and the bed and the mattress in my room up-stairs (or it would have found legs so sure as ever the Furnished bill was up) being presented by the gentlemen engraved "To Mrs. Lirriper a mark of grateful respect for her honourable conduct," gave me a turn which was too much for my feelings. . . . And I went down to Hatfield churchyard outside the coach and kissed my hand and laid it with a kind of a proud and swelling love on my husband's grave, though bless you it had taken me so long to clear his name that my wedding ring was worn quite fine and smooth when I laid it on the green green waving grass.'"

Doers, not
Dreamers.

To show the soul all aglow beneath the rough surface was part of the Dickens plan. We catch the lustre in Peggotty and Betty, in Susan Nipper and Polly Toodle, in Caddy Jellyby and Trotty Veck's daughter, Meg; and though none of them rank as heroines in a brave story, they are of the element from which real heroines are drawn. Little Dorrit was related to them, but cast in ampler mould. One and all were as unaware of their talent as of their charm. "Nobody," says Dickens of Ruth Pinch, "ought to have been able to resist her coaxing manner, and nobody had any business to try. Yet she never seemed to know it was her manner at all. That was the best of it." No pose, no display; a delicious selflessness; the virtue that knows not itself.

Let it be frankly conceded that there is no romance in portraying a heroine as a model manageress. Dickens did not carry us far beyond this in Ruth Pinch in the tiny home with her brother, in Bella Wilfer superintending so anxiously her husband's cottage,

in Little Dorrit making the most of small things in dingy rooms, and in Dame Durden jingling her keys and stocking the cupboards in Bleak House. Who but he, however, has thrown so complete a charm about housewifery, or enabled the primitive truth to be more completely realized, in the words of Burns, that

“If happiness has not her seat
An’ centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
But never can be blest.”

There is something almost ludicrous in creating a heroine out of Dame Durden who had no more elevated duties than to make notes on a slate about jams and pickles and preserves, and bottles and glass and china. She was methodical and old-maidish. So with Dorrit, “the little Mother,” who tripped hither and thither, basket on arm, making cheap purchases, and letting herself out to do needlework—“a modest life of usefulness and happiness.” So with Mrs. Roke-smith, changing from the petulant and

capricious Bella into the wife with "a perfect genius for home—all the loves and graces seeming to have taken domestic service with her, and to help her to make home engaging." It may be a modest ideal, but it is not to be disdained. It is all the more remarkable in being presented by the man who had talked of angels as familiarly as "girls of fifteen talk of puppy dogs."

The Home
Fairy.

Nor is there a prettier idyll anywhere than that of Bella walking with her husband each morning to the railroad, her coquettish ways sobered down, and then returning home, and, the dainty dress laid aside—"trim little wrappers and aprons would be substituted, and Bella, putting back her hair with both hands, as if she were making the most business-like arrangements for going dramatically distracted, would enter on the household affairs of the day. Such weighing and mixing and chopping and grating, such dusting and washing and polishing, such snipping and weeding and trowelling and other small gardening, such making and mending and

folding and airing, such diverse arrangements, and above all, such severe study! For she was under the constant necessity of referring for advice and support to a sage volume entitled *The Complete British Family Housewife*, which she would sit consulting, with her elbows on the table and her temples on her hands, like some perplexed enchantress poring over the Black Art."

We must ask ourselves, not if this be romance, but if it be not cheerful realism. These serviceable women—Esther Summer-son, Little Dorrit, and Bella Wilfer—are the embodiments of a beautiful idea, and, in their lowly guise, they themselves become beautiful. In a miniature way the pictures are perfect enough, or, if "perfect" be too extreme a term, delectable. They may not represent all that man can hope for, but they represent most that satisfies. These house-keeper home-making heroines occupy an important place in the Dickens gallery. They have no superfluous embellishments,

but they are eminently likeable, they are real and near, and they are the intrinsically rich and great "little" women who consecrate human relationships.

Life, Love,
and Ideals.

There remains another phase of deep significance, paramount in importance so far as Dickens is personally concerned. In *David Copperfield* are two unforgettable pictures, each with its pathos, each with its beauty, pictures which are memories bright with joys and a-glister with tears, pictures which tell the story of hopes shattered and hopes attained. The poignancy of it all bites into the heart. Even the glory of the story's end is dimmed with ghost-like shadows.

In his first stories Dickens had mated his heroes to elfin-brides and left us to assume the unbroken happiness of the "ever after." Life taught a different lesson. Dickens's golden dreams had tarnished. He knew something of the bitterness of illusion. He had seen the exquisite dolls of fancy crumble into dust. There is no need here to tell in detail the painful history of his first love, of

a faith which was unrewarded, of a long-cherished ideal and the humiliating and ludicrous discovery of its illusion. It is neither a pleasant nor an edifying subject, but such was the influence of the event that we are seldom allowed to escape from some hint of it in his works. *David Copperfield* reveals the secret, just as *Little Dorrit* desecrates it.

“My child wife!” Think not only of the pitifulness and the self-commiseration of the expression, but of the implied reproach. The Tragedy of Illusion. “Little Blossom,” the “blossom that withered in its bloom upon the tree”—there is nothing more aching to the sense than such words of regret, the words of disappointment after expecting too much, the confession of failure after seeking the impossible. Dickens had expected more than life grants. He had lived in a world of unreality in which a Dora was throned. Dora did her best—she held his pens, she called him pet names. The wondrous world dissolved. “I loved my wife dearly,” said David Copperfield, “and

I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting." Alas, for the little Dresden-china shepherdess, how could she stimulate him, how fulfil his aspirations, how give substance to his enchanted dreams? "What I missed," he wailed, "I still regarded—I always regarded—as something that had been a dream of my youthful fancy, that was incapable of realization, that I was discovering to be so, with some natural pain, as all men did." In these penetrating words we learn of the torture of disenchantment. Not only had Dickens set up a false idol for worship, but he had learnt how false it was. His "angel" was only poor clay after all. "It would have been better for me," he wrote, "if my wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which I had no partner; and that this might have been, I knew. . . . When I thought of the airy dreams of youth that are incapable of realization, I thought of the better state preceding

His Ideals of Womanhood 163

manhood that I had outgrown. And then the contented days with Agnes, in the dear old house, arose before me, like spectres of the dead, that might have some renewal in another world, but never never more could be reanimated here."

As I read the story of the child-wife with sickness, I do not know which to pity more, Dora who never was what David had fancied, or David who despairingly realized what she had never been and never could be. But I revolt from that iniquity which Dickens perpetrated when later he stamped upon the image he had overthrown, and bade us to laugh at his burlesque of the ideal he had once transfigured.

In revealing his mistake in the Dora idealization, however, Dickens made the greater revelation that he had come to the Nearest the Ideal. understanding of what approached nearest to truth. The pretty puppet makes way for the helpful woman. The woman is Agnes Wickfield, a high type, perhaps the highest, a woman with capacity and sweetness, self-

sacrifice and resolution, and with one possession more precious and more powerful than any, vital inspiration. David Copperfield spoke of her as his "right hand," his "good angel." She was not of peerless beauty, but "sweet, placid, tranquil," and our first glimpse of her is only as a youthful housekeeper, "with a little basket-trifle hanging at her side, with keys in it; and she looked as staid and as discreet a housekeeper as the old house could have." No perfervid glorification here—Dickens had got beyond that; to David Copperfield she was, at first sight, no more than "a quiet, good, calm spirit." She does not transcend real womanhood, though, as the story is unfolded, we feel her deepening charm, her rarity of quality, her essential goodness, her intellectual power, her spirituality. Dickens has crowned her as the wife equal with the husband, his counsellor and comrade, his guide to the desired goal. She is a light upon his path. An almost religious atmosphere pervades her. She is "what I would have wished," Copperfield testified, "a sister in friendship, a wife

in devotion and love. I held the source of every worthy aspiration I had ever had, the centre of myself, the circle of my life—my wife, my love of whom was founded on a rock.”

The last words, too, have the invincible strength of a completed argument—“One face, shining on me like a Heavenly light by which I see all other objects, is above and beyond all else. I see it in its beautiful serenity. Oh Agnes, oh my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me like the other shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!”

To most readers of Dickens this character admits of no rival. Yet I think there is one other who is comparable to Agnes and occupies a similar sphere, and fulfils the same destiny. It is not Florence Dombey, admirable as she is as daughter, sister, and wife; not Clemency Newcome with all her beneficent influence; nor can it be such a minor character as Betty or Sissy Jupe. They are different in degree. But there is one who

The Uplifters.

reaches the altitude of Agnes, who has similar gifts, who fulfils as great a mission. It is Lizzie Hexam, often overlooked because of an environment less agreeable and because of her association with a man whom Dickens, with all his art, failed to make acceptable. Lizzie Hexam was the beacon-light to that man cast upon a dangerous sea and buffeted on his passage towards the unseen haven. Like Agnes she had a saving power. She could redeem the wastrel, and give incentive even to a Eugene Wrayburn rusting in indolence, wasting for want of purpose. Agnes bore the burden of an afflicted father; Lizzie bore the burden of a thankless and headstrong brother. The two women stand foremost, side by side. Once again Dickens avoided the error of making them creatures of intoxicating beauty. He showed that lasting love is not of passionate growth, but is rooted in pure esteem. These women become necessary to, and are inseparable from, the men who honour them. And they "point upward."

In depicting such examples Dickens paid

woman her due. He found the ideal and enshrined it. He came to realize that Ruskin had expressed a perfect truth—woman watches over, teaches, and guides man, not man the woman. It is she who buckles on the knight's armour. She is the guiding, though not the determining, factor. Her power is for rule, not battle; her function is praise. Thus she makes the Home "the place of peace, the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, 'doubt, and division. Home is wherever she is, and for a noble woman it stretches far round her, better than ceiled with cedar, or painted with vermilion, shedding its quiet life far, for those who else were homeless." The true heroine, the true wife, is "instinctively, infallibly wise"—"not for self-development, but for self-renunciation; wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side"; and wise in "modesty of service." This is the philosopher's dictum. Dickens supplies the examples.

CHAPTER THE THIRD

HIS PLEA FOR JUSTICE

Two subjects occupied Dickens from the opening to the close of his public career. His personal experiences, a pitying heart, and his knowledge of the world, led him to demand that the poverty-stricken multitude should be accorded a chance to rise, and that breakers of the law should be afforded inducements to reform. He protested hotly against the doctrine of "once poor always poor," "once a criminal always a criminal." He tried to reconcile the Bigwigs with the Nobodies, and to make them understand their mutual interests. He showed that law should be reformative as well as punitive; and, while he severely deprecated the "petting" of prisoners, he as strenuously denounced the de-humanizing of them.

These two themes impelled him to deride misplaced and aggressive Charity, "converting the Good Samaritan into a Pursuing Fury," as in the tragedy of impoverished Betty Higden, and to condemn harsh and cumulative sentences which destroyed hope, as in the example of outcast Will Fern. "The Voice of Time," wrote Dickens, "cries to man, Advance! Ages of darkness, wickedness, and violence have come and gone—millions uncountable have suffered, lived, and died—to point the way. Who turns his back upon the fallen and disfigured of his kind, abandons them as vile, and does not trace and track with pitying eyes the unfenced precipice by which they fell from good—grasping in their fall some tufts and shreds of that lost soil, and clinging to them still when bruised and dying in the gulf below: does wrong to heaven and man, to time, and to eternity."

The new sentiment was preached to a hard age. It was a sentiment of fellowship, toleration, and forbearance; but the age (as now)

was still sending men to gaol for sleeping under a hedge,¹ and still dosing with hard labour the starving miscreant who took a turnip. Dickens was fifty years in advance. Yet perhaps he foresaw, dimly and very doubtfully, that sometime in the twentieth century orders might be issued from the Home Office itself to give first offenders another opportunity, and to offer old convicts a real opening for careers of innocent usefulness. From 1840 to 1870 he begged that justice might be tempered with mercy, and that in crushing out crime the law should not

¹ "Sleeping out" as a crime was frequently a topic of Dickens's satire. There is a passage of mordant humour in *Oliver Twist* relating to the arrest of two men on suspicion of burglary; but—"the suspicious circumstances resolved themselves on investigation into the one fact that they had been discovered sleeping under a haystack; which, although a great crime, is only punishable by imprisonment, and is, in the merciful eye of the English law, and its comprehensive love of all the king's subjects, held to be no satisfactory proof, in the absence of all other evidence, that the sleeper, or sleepers, have committed burglary accompanied with violence, and have therefore rendered themselves liable to the punishment of death."

utterly crush the criminal. A passage from More's *Utopia* may have lingered in his memory: "The object of punishment should simply be the destruction of vice and the reformation of man."

Not for one moment was Dickens the glowing colourist of Splendid Vice. He circled no romantic halo round the head of wickedness. He whined no false sentiment about villainy. The Lytton and Ainsworth school found in him a fierce opponent, and he counteracted its evil influence by exposing the mean and vulgar side of crime, and baring the mind-torture of the wrongdoer.

The Preface to *Oliver Twist* is important as denoting the exposition of an express purpose. It provides a means whereby we judge of the motives and morals of Dickens's fiction, and of the spirit in which he undertook his tasks. All the more valuable in its significance is the pronouncement because it comes at so early a stage in his career.

"I saw no reason, when I wrote this book, why the dregs of life should not serve the

purpose of a moral, as well as its pith and cream. . . . I had read of thieves by scores; seductive fellows (amiable for the most part), faultless in dress, plump in pocket, choice in horseflesh, bold in bearing, fortunate in gallantry, great at a song, a bottle, a pack of cards or dice-box, and fit companions for the bravest. But I had never met (except in Hogarth) with the miserable reality. It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really did exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them as they really were, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great black ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they might; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was needed, and which would be a service to society. And I did it as best I could."

Thus Dickens delivered his blow against gay and debonair scoundrelism, and he solemnly adjured the public which revelled in the beloved vagabondage of Captain Macheath that "nobody having a bent that way would take warning from him, or would

see anything in the play but a flowery and pleasant road, conducting an honourable ambition—in course of time—to Tyburn Tree.”

His own scenes of crime had no allure-
ment, no gilded charm, no prospect of bright-
ness and profit. They were Hogarth-like Vice in Rags
dens of disease and haunts of hunger, fre-
quented by animal-beings in rags and filth.
Sikes was a brute in fustian, not a Massaroni
in green velvet, whether it offended or
pleased; Nancy was a drab in a cheap shawl
staggering under a ruffian's blow, and not
pining or sighing in pink gowns and satin
shoes in a lascivious boudoir. It is won-
derful, as Dickens put it, how Virtue turns
from dirty stockings; and how Vice, married
to ribbons, changes her name as wedded
ladies do, and becomes Romance. He would
not abate one hole in the Dodger's coat, or
one scrap of curl-paper in Nancy's 'dis-
hevelled hair. Out upon those, he cried,
who have such delicacy that they cannot bear
to witness stern truth. “I have no desire to

make proselytes among such people. I had no respect for their opinion, good or bad; did not covet their approval; and did not write for their amusement." Such the declaration. It supplies us with the definite criterion for testing and understanding the aims of the man who strove to make every story a message and a revelation.

Ideas at Variance. Yet this only partially explains the attitude of Dickens, and his position at times is apt to seem paradoxical. Personally he was prejudiced against magistrates and lawyers, and it may be doubted whether his strictures on Dodson and Fogg were fully justified. He had something like contempt for slow-going and somnolent judges, but he made little allowance for the upright and alert. He was full of mistrust, and saw in the dock more injured innocents than rogues and vagabonds. He attached undue importance to isolated cases of harshness, and was wont to vent an excess of wrath on "wooden-heads" and "pettifoggers" who could not differentiate between real and technical offences.

On the other hand he would have a Fagin exposed to the utmost rigour of the law; he advocated whipping for ruffians; and he poured scorn upon the pampering process which permitted Uriah Heep and Littimer to pose as sanctimonious penitents undergoing the mildest of expiations of their sins. At one time he wanted tears shed over the barbarity of the solitary system; at another he wanted to terminate the experiments in leniency. First the plea, then the diatribe—we scarcely know where to have him. But if an average can be struck we certainly find him with the Howards and Frys in their work of mercy and reform.

Dickens was not an arm-chair theorist in these matters, and he did not expend his powers on abstract cases. He knew the police-court and the inside of the prison; he watched the demeanour of the men who sat in judgment as well as of those who were judged. The law of England was in a notoriously unsatisfactory state. Public hangings were not quite out of fashion, and

Law opposed
to Justice.

barbaric sentences on trivial offenders, even when they were mere boys and girls, were still in vogue. An Oliver Twist could be doomed to three months' imprisonment—"with hard labour, of course"; a Will Fern could be consigned to gaol again and again for cutting a twig, sleeping in a shed, and begging a crust of bread; an Abel Magwitch could be sent remorselessly to the gallows for returning from transportation. The law seemed positively to rejoice in making criminals of the lower orders, and in forcing them to return to the paths of crime. Once they fell they were regarded as incorrigible. Vainly they asked for humane consideration; despairingly they looked for reclamation. "The constable, the keeper—anybody—finds me anywhere, a-doing anything, and gaol's the only home I've got," said Will Fern.

Quite late in his life, and thirty years after his campaign had begun, Dickens was able to give this concrete case of the manufacture of gaol-birds—

"Two labouring men leave their work for

half a day (having given notice of their intention beforehand, and having risen betimes to make amends) and go to see a review : which review is commended to their fellows and neighbours as a highly patriotic and loyal sight. Under a foolish old Act of Parliament which nobody but a country justice would have the kindred foolishness to enforce, the men are haled before country justices and committed by these Brobdingnagian donkeys to gaol—illegally, by the bye, but never mind that. An unconstitutional person in the neighbourhood, making this Bedlamite cruelty known, there arises a growl of wonder and dissatisfaction from all the other unconstitutional persons in the country. We try the Home Secretary, but he ‘sees no reason’ to reverse the decision—and how can we expect that he should? Knowing that he never sees any reason, hears any reason, or utters any reason, for anything?”

It seemed almost futile to appeal to common-sense, and absolutely hopeless to appeal to pity; but “Begin at the Right End.” Dickens saw plainly that the remedy could only come when a better understanding had been created between the classes, when a stronger sympathy linked

rich and poor, and when the authorities did not regard every down-at-heels as a potential "hardened offender," and the man in the dust did not look on the man in power as a heartless enemy. The remedy could not be merely superficial—that would but skin and film the ulcerous sore. To be effectual it must begin at the very root of the evil. "Gentlemen," said Will Fern, "dealing with men like me, begin at the right end. Give us, in mercy, better homes when we're a-lying in our cradles; give us better food when we're a-working for our lives; give us kinder laws to bring us back when we're a-going wrong; and don't set Gaol, Gaol, Gaol, afore us everywhere we turn. . . . The labourer has a patient, peaceful, willing heart. But you must put his rightful spirit in him first. . . . His spirit is divided from you at this time. Bring it back, bring it back!" These homely words sum up a whole philosophy—the philosophy of social life, of kinship, of the proper application of the law, of help to the fallen, of mercy, of rescue, of kindly feeling and sympathy, of the breaking-down of class-

barriers, and of the true relationship between rich and poor.

Reformers were at work, but, as Dickens put it, they had begun at the wrong end. Too often the helping hand was outstretched to the least deserving, and poverty and weakness were treated worse than depravity. ^{The Wrong}
^{End.} Supposing, said Dickens, there were two cases in the papers one day;—one, the case of an indigent woman who died in a most deplorable and abject condition, neglected and unassisted by the parish authorities; and the other the case of an infamous woman, drunken and profligate, a convicted felon, a returned transport, an habitual inmate of Houses of Correction, destitute of the lowest attributes of decency, a Pet Prisoner in the Model Prison, where the interesting creature was presented with a large gratuity for her excellent conduct:—I wonder whether it would occur to any governing power in the country that there might be something wrong here? “Because,” he added, “I make bold to say that such a shocking instance of Pet Prisoning, and Pet Poor Law Administering,

has profounder depths of mischief in it than Red Tape can fathom."

"Pet Prisoners." He called attention in 1855 to "a detachment of monomaniacs who, under the name of gaol-chaplains, had taken possession of the prisons and were clearly offering premiums to vice, promoting hypocrisy, and making models of dangerous scoundrels. They had their way, and now the Pets recruit the very worst class of criminals known. . . . Down at Westminster, night after night, the Rt. Hon. Gentleman the Member for Somewhere, and the Rt. Hon. Gentleman the Member for Somewhereelse, badger one another to the infinite delight of their adherents in the cockpit; and when the Prime Minister has relieved his noble bosom of its personal injuries, and has made his jokes and retorts for the evening, and has said little and done less, he winds up with a standard form of words, and they all go home to bed."

In the opinion of Dickens (and he supplied a series of examples contrasting the pampering of prisoners with the oppression of

paupers) the whole system savoured of burlesque worthy of Gilbert's biting satire—

“A burglar, or garrotter, or indeed a common thief
Is very glad to batten on potatoes and on beef,
Or anything, in short, that prison kitchens can afford—
A cut above the diet in a common workhouse ward ;
But it never was intended that the discipline of gaol
Should dash a convict's spirits, or make him thin and
pale.”

To crush the poor, not the criminal, was the rule in Bumbledom. The “parochial safeguard,” according to the hierophant of old-fashioned guardians, was a “properly managed” system of out-of-door relief which consisted of “giving the paupers exactly The Workhouse System what they don't want, and then they get tired of coming. That's the great principle.” All hope was to be abandoned by those who once entered the workhouse walls. Dickens found an unfortunate young girl in this national refuge and at once saw how much happier would have been her fate had she stolen a watch and been sent to gaol. He went to Wapping and saw enough in ten minutes in the women's wards to make him cease to believe “in such fables of a golden time as

youth, the prime of life, or a hale old age. In ten minutes all the lights of womankind seemed to have been blown out, and nothing in that way to be left this vault to brag of, but the flickering and expiring snuffs." He went to Whitechapel—this was just fifty years ago—and beheld the "nightly scene" of motionless, hungry, shivering wretches lying on the muddy pavement, shut out of the Casual Ward. He found a bright-eyed woman, who had committed no crime save that of surviving to the age of ninety-three, condemned to pine away in a cell, instead of being gently tended and her last days comforted. Would that be much to do? he asked. "When Britain first, at Heaven's command, arose, with a great deal of allegorical confusion, from out the azure main, did her guardian angels positively forbid it in the Charter which has been so much besung?" All his power, all his scorn, all his indignation were concentrated in the story of Betty Higden, refusing the Charity which contaminates and whips and destroys; for he believed, and set forth his belief in terms as

unmistakable as they were severe, that "there has been in England, since the days of the Stuarts, no law so often infamously administered, no law so often violated, no law habitually so ill-supervised as the Poor Law."

I do not contend that Dickens was always right. I should prefer to say he was simply righteous. Both in regard to crime and poverty the feelings are dangerous guides. Compassion is easily misdirected in these matters; sympathy can be woefully, even fatally, misapplied; mercy may be a feeble surrender, a narcotic to conscience. Dickens's heart beat true, but Draco's head is clear. Dickens bemoaned the fate of the erring individual; Draco perceives his duty towards injured society. The one was full of pity, which at times had to give way to rage; the other is full of vigour which at times needs modifying and humanizing. But of Dickens's exaltation of motive there is no question, and even when extremes led him astray he was not retrograde, but still marching onward, the goal unconfused.

Social Reform.

In the same spirit he undertook his task of social reform. He was the non-partisan throwing himself with irrepressible fervour into the democratic cause. It is not so wonderful that he engaged in the mighty task as to know that, so short an interval ago, such a mighty task awaited him. The years are few that divide us from the Debtors' Prison, Yorkshire Schools, Death Ships, the most outrageous forms of Bumbledom, the harshest of Poor Laws, and the most vicious systems of Nursing; yet already the gap which sunders Then and Now seems unspanned, so great is the change, so few the links left. There was much to do—an appalling "much." Some part has been done. We are dealing now with vestiges and relics.

The Duty of Rulers.

That poignant allegory, *Nobody's Story*, contains the germ of the social reformer's gospel. It represents the condition of the masses, the unwieldy, ignorant, much-governed, little-aided "Nobody," the voiceless multitude, the unconsidered crowd—it represents them in their floundering misery,

the sport of busybodies, the serfs of officialdom. The problem as Dickens perceived it was appalling enough. The rulers and the ruled in conflict, prejudice and inefficiency on the one side and unmerited suffering and ignominy on the other, the fear of granting too much, the pain of receiving too little, the denial of education and recreation, the blight of ignorance and aimlessness, the penalty exacted by outraged nature and the unpreparedness to resist her scourges, the catastrophes which begin, but do not stop, at the poor man's door but extend to castle and mansion—these are the facts and factors social reformers have to face, these are the ills they have to recognize and the wrongs they have to redress. The squabbles of experimentalists only confuse; they cannot cure. "We cannot live healthily," wailed Nobody to the Bigwigs, "unless they who undertake to manage us provide the means. We cannot be instructed, unless they will teach us; we cannot be rationally amused, unless they will amuse us; we cannot but have some false gods of our own, while they

set up so many of theirs in all the public places. The evil consequences will all come from us . . . and will spread far and wide, like the pestilence." The name of Nobody is Legion.

The Beginning
of Reform.

Dickens had the satisfaction of noting and chronicling the improvements which his reforming zeal had helped to expedite. The Preface to his first book is a reminder of the earnestness with which he pursued his mission, and of the practical nature of his crusade. He remarked that the licence of blustering Counsel, the deliberate bewildering of juries, and the sharp practice of pettifogging attorneys, had exercised legal minds, and "a spirit of self-respect, mutual forbearance, education, and co-operation" had become manifest; the suffering public had had its convenience considered in the Courts; and Parliamentary Elections were becoming more disciplined and regenerate. With a note of admiration, Dickens called attention to the fact—"The laws relating to imprisonment for debt are altered; the Fleet Prison is pulled down!" Who knows, he added, but

by the time *Pickwick* was concluded, "it may be discovered that there are even magistrates in town and country who should be taught to shake hands every day with Common-sense and Justice; that even Poor Laws may have mercy on the weak, the aged, and unfortunate; that Schools, on the broad principles of Christianity, are the best adornment for the length and breadth of this civilized land; that Prison-doors should be barred on the outside, no less heavily and carefully than they are barred within; that the universal diffusion of common means of decency and health is as much the right of the poorest of the poor, as it is indispensable to the safety of the rich, and of the State; that a few petty boards and bodies—less than drops in the great ocean of humanity which roars around them—are not for ever to let loose Fever and Consumption on God's creatures at their will, or always keep their jobbing little fiddles going for a Dance of Death."

Thus early had been outlined the crusade of the young man of two or three and twenty;

Fancy versus
Fact.

he never relaxed to the end of his life.¹ The same themes recur, the same battle is fought, the same text is preached from, the same truths are proclaimed, the same goads are used in the casual article and the elaborate volume; the voice of age was the voice of youth. Never was greater persistency; never was grimmer determination. *Pickwick*, the comic, light-hearted, diverting *Pickwick*, sounded its solemn note as well as *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*. The denunciation of a rigorous Poor Law administration in

¹ As a mere formal record of Dickens's dealings with prison problems, it may be mentioned that he devoted four articles to them in the *Sketches by Boz*, "Criminal Courts," "A Visit to Newgate," "The Prisoners' Van," and "The Black Veil"; in the *Uncommercial Traveller* his principal contribution was that entitled "The Ruffian"; and in the *Miscellaneous Essays* we have the longest and most important series of all—"Crime and Education," "Capital Punishment," "Ignorance and Crime," "Judicial Special Pleading," "Colman at the Old Bailey," "Pet Prisoners" (several articles), "The Finishing Schoolmaster," "Legal and Equitable Jokes," "The Worthy Magistrate," "The Murdered Person," "The Demeanour of Murderers," "Five New Points of Criminal Law," etc. Many of the points and the leading arguments are reproduced in the novels.

Oliver Twist was repeated in *Our Mutual Friend*, though an interval of thirty years separated the two; the Preface to *Pickwick* in 1838 had a sequel in the famous Postscript of 1865.

He believed in education as a supreme remedy, and declared that ignorance and crime were mother and child. He asked for rational recreation as a moral stimulant. He pleaded for cheerful religion. Finally he demanded relief from "Fact, fact, fact," which was to have made Coketown a Paradise, but had converted it into a dreary Inferno. The world needs the solace of fancy, the refuge of romance. Otherwise life is warped and blighted, hope is thwarted, the mind is robbed of its pleasures, and the social state is made sterile. The Gradgrind philosophy means lovelessness, joylessness, and death. Ignorance will pass and crime grow rare, when men and women, like Sissy Jupe, become "learned in childish lore, thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised, trying hard to know humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives

Cultivate the
Fancy.

of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show will be the Writing on the Wall." "In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor, we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide the day) can never be extinguished." So he wrote in *Household Words*—a message to be heeded, a truth that should sink deep into the heart. Herein lay the secret that made Sissy Jupe's poor life profitable, and that filled the dark hours of crippled Jenny Wren with joy. The child must dream of the star, and sport with the fairies, and hear elfin music, and be lifted above the hard materialism of the world's prison-house.

"Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it."

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

HIS PATRIOTISM

(a) *John Bull.*

IN his Preface to *Martin Chuzzlewit* Dickens gives an explanation of his motive in dealing with that complex character whom we know under the generic title of "John Bull." Explaining his criticism of the faults which he detected in the American system, he said that he hoped the good-humoured people of the United States would not quarrel with him for his strictures, inasmuch as he had "never, in writing fiction, had any disposition to soften what was ridiculous at home." John Bull at home had—and still has—many features which excite the sharp strokes of the satirist, and call for the solemn admonition of those who would see him better, worthier, and wiser.

In a variety of ways Dickens endeavoured

to amend the nation's ideas of its semi-perfection, and to make it comprehend that self-sufficient satisfaction was a peril. Anything in the way of arrogance offended him, but in particular he deplored that dullness, that obstinate obtuseness, that distortion of vision, which enable faulty persons to entertain a calm conviction that all the world is wrong but themselves. "We Britons," wrote Dickens in *Great Expectations*, "had particularly settled that it was treasonable to doubt our having and our being the best of everything; otherwise, while I was scared by the immensity of London, I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty." On another occasion, writing with sardonic humour of "Our Bore," he said of this not unfamiliar type of Briton: "Among his deepest-rooted convictions it may be mentioned that he considers the air of England damp, and holds that our lively neighbours—he always calls the French our lively neighbours—have the advantage of us in that

particular. Nevertheless he is unable to forget that John Bull is John Bull all the world over, and that England with all her faults is England still." It is this John Bull "all the world over" who excited apprehension in Dickens's mind. He himself was so intelligent and so fervent a patriot that he doubted whether the singing of "Rule, Britannia" was sufficient to secure British pre-eminence for ever and ever.

A glance in history's mirror enables us to perceive the traditional John Bull figure, who, as Dr. Arbuthnot first described him, was an honest, sturdy, obstinate old fellow, very well satisfied with himself, very confident of his own powers, a little intolerant of other people, tenaciously holding to the customs of his forefathers, and quite reluctant to learn anything new. Such a person, when on his best behaviour and in his most amiable mood, may be estimable in spite of his faults and crotchets; but take him at extremes and there is little to say in his favour. His obstinacy then becomes fatuous, his peppery

"The Old Original."

temper violent, his intolerance fanatical, and his love of old fashions absurdly retrograde. It was this John Bull in his worst, but not unusual, aspect whom Dickens held up to ridicule and desired to amend. He disliked his insular prejudice and arrogance. He disliked his overbearing habits, his petty tyranny, his class distinctions, his pretentious superiority. He disliked his official ineptitude, his departmental evasions, his slowness of action, and his unreasonable animus. He disliked the hereditary legislator with "a family as old as the hills but infinitely more respectable," with "a pedigree six hundred years old and a head six hundred years thick." He disliked the youthful progeny when "prigs," and he disliked the body of rulers who ruled oppressively in their various parishes and divided the human race into two parts, the Bigwigs, who ought to enjoy every privilege, and the Nobodies, who should be deprived of all. We trace to this dislike his portrayal of the Gradgrinds, the Bounderbys, Lord Boodle, Sir Leicester Dedlock, the

Guardians of Bumbledom, Alderman Cute, the Tite Barnacles, Sapsea, and Mr. Podsnap.

Nor must Mrs. John Bull be overlooked. As the "ministering angel" Dickens paid her his full tribute. But he disliked her also And his Wife, in her more perturbing, vexatious, and ram-pagious moods—she must not be a short-sighted Mrs. Jellyby, an interfering Mrs. Pardiggle, an overbearing Mrs. Markleham, a fretful Mrs. Varden, an unreasonable Mrs. Wilfer, or a vixenish, virulent Mrs. Snagsby, who was "too violently compressed about the waist, and with a nose like a sharp autumn evening, inclining to be frosty towards the end"—a housewife and helpmeet who "managed the money, reproached the tax-gatherers, appointed the time and place of devotion on Sundays, and acknowledged no responsibility as to the dinner."

These types are not contrary to nature. They exist, and are partly representative of John Bull and his womankind. They are national Froth and Insolence. specimens, and Dickens had a distinct pur-

pose in giving us their realistic portraits and in enabling them to see their own reflections as in a glass, and not darkly. In performing a disagreeable duty Dickens was animated by a true patriotism; and, loving his country and his countrymen, ardent for their well-being and jealous of their good name, he aimed at bringing about a racial improvement and producing a higher type of the British citizen whether in the home, or in public life, or in international relationship. A son has told us that his father never learnt politics, and that they were to him "an instinct rather than a science." When he was asked to enter the House of Commons he said, as so few men dare to say, that to accomplish reform he could do more good outside. He knew our talking-house but too well. He knew John Bull's habit of allowing the stimulus from outside to evaporate in words when he got inside.

The honourable member for Verbosity was a familiar vision, and became a proper target for his scorn. Do any of us recognize

the honourable member for Verbosity now?— that eloquent master of unmeaning sentences, who enraptured his audience by exclaiming with a fervour rising to passionate declamation that “his principles are written in the countenance of the lion and the unicorn, are stamped upon the royal shield those animals support, and upon the free words of fire which that shield bore.” “His principles are Britannia and her sea-trident. His principles are commercial prosperity co-existently with perfect and profound agricultural contentment. His principles are the addition of his colours nailed to the mast, every man’s heart in the right place, every man’s eye open, every man’s hand ready; or, in a word, Hearths and Altars, Labour and Capital, Crown and Sceptre, Elephant and Castle.” And when an audacious objector begged to know what the honourable member was driving at, the honourable member triumphantly replied, and settled his principles once and for all, by declaring that he was driving at “the illimitable perspective.”

Windbag
Oratory.

The honourable member for Verbosity was equally felicitous in his votes. When he seemed to be voting pure white, it was just as likely he was voting jet black; and when he said Yes, those who disagreed with him might take it for granted that he meant No. That was his statesmanship. If you objected to it, he at once floored you by demanding to know if you were prepared to destroy the sacred bulwarks of our nationality? The borough of Verbosity has not yet been disfranchised, and its eminent representative is still in evidence and his services much in request during a General Election campaign. In all likelihood he prepares some of the answers to questions in the House of Commons; in time of war he acts as military adviser; in time of peace he deals with miscarriages of justice in the Home Department; and he is so admired by John Bull that he is always safe for a peerage.

**The Danger
Signals.**

Dickens could not take pride in a nation which allowed itself to be so imposed upon

and misgoverned. He was living in an England of rapid transition, but he had seen ignorance stalking the land like an epidemic, had seen the poor born to a heritage of woe, and had seen the working multitudes groping in darkness and barely articulate. Old and bad institutions were maintained because they suited the conservative taste of John Bull. There were schools that did not instruct, charities that were not kind, and reformatories that only hardened the offender. But in the midst of this darkness there were tremblings of light; in the inert and paralyzed masses there were indications of movement and even of upheavals. A silent revolution was in progress, and some one was needed to speak the people's desires and voice their aspirations. Dickens, sprung from the masses, experienced in poverty, one who had suffered and struggled, was the man for the times. He girded at wrongs as the knights of chivalry girded at pagans. He roused John Bull from his lethargy by revealing to his wondering eyes what he had

yet to do to make England happier and greater. He pricked his tough sides and his tougher conscience. He bade him laugh at his own absurdities by putting a fool's cap on antiquities no longer useful. He taught him that contempt for the foreigner was not patriotism, not even good sense; and he reminded him—sometimes by delicate reproof, sometimes by stern denunciation, but most often by ridicule and Rabelaisian laughter—that he was grotesquely wrong in many matters, deplorably backward, and had no cause to boast that even frog-eating Frenchmen were his inferiors.

Warnings
from France.

Without putting the direct question, Dickens continually invoked the inquiry—Wherein lay the vast superiority of England over foreign nations? He exposed the whole fallacy of John Bull's supercilious scoffs at distant and less-favoured races by that merciless comparison which he instituted between Great Britain and France at the close of the year 1775. "There were," he wrote in his *Tale of Two Cities*, "a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain

face on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face on the throne of France. In both countries it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes that things in general were settled for ever." The parallel then became deadly enough, as he proceeded to point out that in England there were spiritual manifestations of her favoured state. In France, it was atheistical and traitorous to declare that something approaching perfection had not been reached. Yet the forces of revolution were equally busy in both countries. England had received a message from British subjects in America that meant, in the end, the total loss of that dominion. France was receiving warnings, if she could but have heeded them, of a revolt of the 'downtrodden lower orders which meant the loss of the sovereign's rights.

So far, what had England to boast of? In what respect was she better off than the despised neighbour? Was her social condition happier?

“There was scarcely,” wrote Dickens, “an amount of order and protection to justify much national boasting. Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies, took place in the capital every night; the highwayman in the dark was a city tradesman in the light; the mail was waylaid by armed robbers; prisoners in gaols fought battles with their turnkeys, and the majesty of the law fired blunderbusses among them; the mob fired on musketeers and the musketeers fired on the mob; . . . the hangman was in constant requisition, to-day taking the life of an atrocious murderer, and to-morrow of a wretched pilferer who had robbed a farmer’s boy of sixpence; . . . and nobody thought any of these occurrences much out of the common way.”

Dickens had shrewdly perceived that there was a good deal in common between wretched Paris and wretched London, between seething England and seething France; and the crisis in the one land, with its attendant horrors, might well have been the crisis in the other. His comparison between the two countries was a flaming danger-signal. It called attention to a

Men who will
not Learn.

positive menace and peril; and Dickens was but engaged on a patriot's duty in saying to the smug, complacent, and bump-tious Briton—"Take heed that your fate is not as the fate of the other. Nothing to learn? You have everything to learn. Nothing to improve? You have everything to improve. Nothing to fear? You have everything to fear." He forced the moral home by his reference to the American Declaration of Independence, the revolt of an exasperated people who, if nearer home, might have dealt with George as the infuriated Jacques dealt with Louis. It was a national service to remind John Bull of what might have been, and to rouse him from that absurdest of delusions that nothing has ever been wrong with himself or calculated to cause him a moment's disquietude.

Yet there was, and probably is, a surviving John Bull in the form of Mr. Sapsea, auctioneer, "the purest jackass in Cloisterham," "voting at elections in the strictly respectable interest"; "morally satisfied that

nothing but himself had grown since he was a baby"—the type of the dunderheaded Briton who always proposed one toast as fitting to his sentiments and as exhibiting his senselessness :

“When the French come over,
May we meet them at Dover.”

“This,” observed Dickens, “was a patriotic toast in Mr. Sapsea’s infancy, and he was therefore fully convinced of its being appropriate to any subsequent era.” Highly patriotic, no doubt, but so fatuous that the honest patriot views it with consternation, as did Tennyson during the same era when he bade his fellow-men to “wink no more in slothful overtrust,” nor to let the cannon moulder on the seaward wall. Wordsworth sounded the same note in his immortal Sonnets on Liberty. Words and boasts ensure no victory, and the time comes when insolent self-esteem and vainglory are more to be dreaded than a hostile invasion. Dickens therefore joined in the effort to arouse in the nation a sense of responsibility.

(b) *Podsnap.*

There was a dead wall of impenetrable thickness in the path of the reformer. It checked national progress, and it prevented social reform. Dickens called it Podsnappery. It was the rampart which John Bull erected in his vanity to keep out those hated enemies, the advance-guard of deeper and vaster knowledge. This land was the centre of civilization and of all that was correct; somewhere beyond, over a few miles of sea-water, lay a "frog-eating and wooden-shoe-wearing country"; and it was an ineradicable article of faith that

"Every Frenchman wore a pigtail and curl-papers; that he was extremely sallow, thin, long-faced, and lantern-jawed; that the calves of his legs were invariably undeveloped, and that his shoulders were always higher than his ears. If he was not a dancing-master or a barber, he was a cook, no other trades being congenial to his tastes. He lived on weak soup and an onion. He was a slave, of course. It may be generally summed up of this inferior people that they had no idea of anything."

“It is agreeable,” added Dickens, “and perhaps pardonable, to indulge in a little self-complacency when our right to it is so thoroughly established.” What had sturdy John Bull, the victor at Agincourt and Waterloo, to learn of this degenerate race? Nothing. France could not even provide him with a model for abattoirs while his own slaughter-houses were centres of pestilence. As for Germany, it scarcely existed. So Englishmen continued to be contented to entrench themselves behind the walls of Podsnappery, and to trust Mr. Podsnap.

Podsnap
portrayed.

Mr. Podsnap was well-to-do, and stood very high in Mr. Podsnap's opinion. He had thriven exceedingly, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody else was not quite satisfied. He got rid of disagreeable things by putting them out of existence with a flourish of his right arm. In this way he cleared the world of all difficult matters. He considered other countries a mistake; of their manners and customs he would conclusively

observe "Not English!" Then, with a flourish of his right arm they were swept away. As a respectable man Mr. Podsnap felt it was required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always knew exactly what Providence meant. And it was very remarkable and very comfortable that whatever Providence meant was invariably what Mr. Podsnap meant. Mr. Podsnap's house was of hideous solidity. Everything was made to look as heavy as it could and to take up as much room as possible. Everything was ugly, corpulent, unsightly, pot-bellied, and weighed "ever so much."

Mr. Podsnap met a foreign gentleman with a limited knowledge of English, and at once treated him as a child who was hard of hearing—

"'Our language,' he said, with a gracious consciousness of being always right, 'is Difficult. Ours is a Copious Language, and Trying to Strangers. . . . Our English adverbs do not terminate in Mong, and we

pronounce the "ch" as if there were a "t" before it. . . . We are very proud of our Constitution, sir. It was bestowed upon us by Providence. No other Country is so favoured as This Country. . . . Other countries—I am sorry to be obliged to say it—do *as* they do. So it is. It was the Charter of the Land. This Island was blest, sir, to the Direct Exclusion of such Other Countries as—as there may happen to be. And if we were all Englishmen present, I would say,' added Mr. Podsnap, solemnly, 'that there is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, a modesty, an independence, a responsibility, a repose, combined with an absence of everything calculated to call a blush into the cheek of a young person, which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth.' And with his favourite right-arm flourish, he put the rest of Europe, and the whole of Asia, Africa, and America nowhere."

Hear this noble patriot discourse on social wrongs. It was brought to his notice that half-a-dozen people had lately died in the streets of starvation. Mr. Podsnap thought the reference to such a circumstance was highly impolite, that it was clearly ill-timed after dinner, and that it was not in good taste.

Podsnap on
Poverty.

“I don’t believe it,” said Mr. Podsnap, putting it behind him. He was told that the inquests and the registrar’s returns proved it. “Then it was their own fault,” said Mr. Podsnap. Some one ventured to reply that people did not prefer to die of starvation and would have avoided it if they could. To which Mr. Podsnap replied—“There is not a country in the world, sir, where so noble a provision is made for the poor as in this country.” He was told how a vast improvement might be brought about. “Not English!” said Mr. Podsnap. And finding that this did not wholly suppress the would-be reformer he added—“I must decline to pursue this painful discussion. It is not pleasant to my feelings. It is repugnant to my feelings. I do not admit these things, but if they do occur the fault lies with the sufferers themselves. It is not for me to impugn the workings of Providence. Besides, the subject is an odious one, and I——” and with a flourish of his arm he removed it from the face of the earth.

Podsnap in
Uniform.

If Podsnap in private garb is bad, Podsnap in official livery is worse. John Bull is then seen in his unbending and unapproachable attitude; all things, animate or inanimate, must adapt themselves to him. Our laws are to be universal laws, our customs universal customs, our weights and measures universal weights and measures; and any one who cannot speak our language is a poor deluded heathen. That is the opinion of the lower-grade John Bull, who thinks the British flag hides a multitude of his own sins. It was of such a man that Dickens has left us a portrait in Mr. Commissioner Pordage, the obscure but self-important, hide-bound, red-tape British official, who thought he could solve every problem, meet every crisis, master every catastrophe, and probably overawe an earthquake, by putting on his diplomatic coat. When negro pirates threatened murder and the captain of a ship proposed to take measures of defence, Mr. Pordage complained of irregularity—"There has been no written correspondence, no documents have

passed, no memoranda have been made, no entries and counter-entries appear in the official muniments. This is indecent. Desist. Send up instantly for my diplomatic coat." And when finally the captain saved the lives of his passengers, Mr. Pordage handed in a written protest. It is all deliciously ironical, but too near the truth to be wholly diverting. For, as Dickens was so fond of putting it in allegory, we are still tyrannized over by a ^{Red Tap} dreadful godmother who can "stop the fastest thing in the world, change the strongest into the weakest, and the most useful into the most useless." Her name is Tape. When Prince Bull went to war, and spent his money freely, Tape caused mismanagement on the part of the officials, and everything went wrong; provisions did not reach the army, the sick were left untended, and, thanks to Tape, the noble army of Prince Bull perished. When an inquiry was ordered, Tape spoilt it. When reforms were suggested, Tape prevented them. And though Prince Bull suffered extremely, Tape

remained triumphant to the last. This all sounds so modern that we need to recall that Dickens wrote the sketch over forty years ago. But Tape is immortal, and history repeats itself. Tape is one of John Bull's precious possessions. She is the presiding genius of his patent indestructible Circumlocution Office. "The most important department under Government" was Dickens's description of this gigantic sham. "No public business of any kind could possibly be done at any time without the acquiescence of the Circumlocution Office. Its finger was in the largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart. . . . Whatever was required to be done the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving—how Not to Do it. . . ." "Mechanicians, natural philosophers, soldiers, sailors, petitioners, memorialists, people with grievances, people who wanted to prevent grievances, people who wanted to redress grievances, jobbing people, jobbed people, people who couldn't

The
Circumlocution
Office.

get rewarded for merit, and people who couldn't get punished for demerit"—do they not still haunt Whitehall in John Bull's island?

The John Bull who did not like to be disturbed out of his indolent dream that all was right and proper was exactly the John Bull with whom Dickens was in conflict. His environment, his experiences, and his nature as moulded under exceptional conditions, were against it. He had been one of the sufferers under antique systems and under hidebound laws, and he had felt the pangs and disadvantages of social inequalities. Hence his sympathy with the poor and oppressed, hence his poignant interest in their hardships, hence his keenness in detecting where amendment was required. "In all my writings," he said, "I hope I have taken every available opportunity of showing the want of sanitary improvements in the neglected dwellings of the poor." He left pictures of Bleeding Heart Yard, and of prosperous John Bull's poverty-regions,

The Strife
against
Podsnappery.

which still make our cheeks burn with shame. He taught how difficult it was in his time for the toiling masses to assert themselves, or to attempt to better their condition by the exercise of the same laws that their employers adopted. He desired every chance of improvement in status, health, and happiness to be given to those who were born of low degree.

**Prospects of
Victory.**

Dickens's bitter irony directed against Podsnappery in all its forms can best be understood as we realize what his own attitude was towards that false patriotism which renders us blind to our own defects as a nation and insolent towards other nations from whom at least some profitable lessons might be derived. Podsnappery stands for the perpetuation of all that is wrong, slow, old-fashioned, and unprogressive, because it obstinately blinds itself to the glaring iniquities that exist and arrogantly proclaims that reform is not required, not even possible. His moral would be that it is better to be alive to faults, than in ignorance to assert

perfection; and that it is a truer patriotism to admit error where it is found than to make the blatant boast that all is well. Pod-snappery does not see the ulcer in the body politic; the patriot acknowledges its presence and seeks to remove it. The one conceals, and the other cures; the one deceives himself with a lie, but the other grapples with the truth. Dickens's purpose was to touch the conscience of men who aimed at higher things—and he did this in his own inimitable fashion of holding up to ridicule the arrogant fool on the lowest slope who spared himself effort by boasting that the pinnacle was already attained.

In other words, John Bull has realized some of his weaknesses, has discovered the joints in his armour, and is disposed to take Dickens's lessons to heart. John Bull has honestly, though slowly, tried to reform. *The Reforms.*
Circumlocution, imprisonment for debt,
public executions, barbaric sentences on child
offenders, education, rational amusement for the poorer orders, death-ships, purer food,

healthier cities, the abolition of slum areas, the patent laws, better treatment of old soldiers, the workhouse system—all these have had his attention, and though he still has much to do, yet he can claim to have made a beginning and done a little. The spur to action and progress is found in Dickens. It was not an enemy who did this thing, but a lover of his country and his countrymen; not a fault-finder eager to betray the shortcomings of his native land, but a patriot who desired her efficiency and supremacy. Dickens was a righteous counsellor and a devoted friend, the friend who dares to chide the fault because he fears that fault will be fatal. The bravest and the noblest work he did was in his righteous censure—a censure that made for holiness, for advancement, for the welfare alike of the individual and the race.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

HIS GALLERY OF HYPOCRITES

(a) *Crayon Sketches.*

THE hypocrites and humbugs of Dickens's novels make a weird procession, creeping and cringing, with smirking faces, hollow smiles, unreal grimacings, writhing limbs, absurd contortions, and shifty eyes. A few are pompous and inflated, full of confidence and conceit, self-important and vain-glorious; but the majority crawl like reptiles, spitting their poison at unsuspecting victims. All are equally false of heart and foul in spirit, whether grovelling with mock humility, or with impudent effrontery brazening out their shame. Beneath the surface there are fuming passions, burning animosities, loathsome revenges.

The Dickens creed was that the hypocrite murders faith. He is the foe of honesty, the

pest of social life. No craft too subtle, no meanness too deep, no malignity too great, no selfish sin too wicked; the hypocrite is nothing if not thorough.) It needed a Hercules to throttle the Lernean hydra, and only a giant power can cope with the hypocrite in his protean shapes and wily machinations.

The case must be put strongly, because in considering the Dickens depictions of typical impostors we come to a specialized and monstrous class which he treated with unmitigated rigour. Dickens allowed no redeeming feature in the hypocrite, and believed that the mask concealed nothing but treachery, cruelty, and hate. Such a creature comes with corrupting force into the midst of men; his own dissembling, when at last detected, engenders perpetual suspicion; the discovery of duplicity is a blow to future confidence. Those who trusted once can trust no more. The hypocrite is a polluting influence, a desecrator of things holy. Masters of satire and invective have used

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their powers with fiercest zeal against the whole tribe, Dante reserving for hypocrites the lowest region in the stenching city of Dis, Molière setting Tartuffe in an indestructible pillory of contempt; and Shakespeare leaving Iago to expiate his crimes by a nameless fate of horror in a half-dug grave.

One man in later days, a remorseless analyst, a despiser of shams, and a master of scornful exposure, made resolve to war against the evil-doers and to warn the innocent against their virulence. Dickens has left us an unparalleled gallery of portraits, unparalleled in extent and variety, unparalleled in their revelations of depravity. There, in hideous garbs and stripped of disguises, there in disfigurement and obscenity, loom the caricatures of men, defacings and defilings of the Divine image. Dickens intended these Rembrandtesque paintings of harsh colours and strong shadows to serve a double purpose—punishment of deceivers, caution to the deceived. We look, recognize, understand. The unclean, the lepers who

Dickens in wrath.

contaminate, are labelled indelibly, and when next a Pecksniff meets us with bland smiles and unctuous phrases, or a Pumblechook offers a snorting admiration, or a Bounderby roars us down while acclaiming his own virtues, or a Job Trotter melts irrepressibly into tears, or a Uriah Heep glides to the bosom ready to sting the heart that warms him—we shall be forewarned, and perchance preserved from danger. Dickens drew the portraits vividly, and showed the realities beneath the veil; he left them to everlasting ridicule or flagellation. He hated and spared not, for he believed that cant is as pestilent as crime, and that the venom of the serpent is as deadly as the stiletto of the assassin.

This furious crusade against hypocrisy may be traced definitely to its source. Granted that Dickens was born with an intense dislike for every form of insincerity; granted that he was inflamed against the Blifil race during his youthful reading; granted that early experiences impressed

upon him the mischief wrought by designing rogues : yet we must look still deeper for the reason which so powerfully swayed him. He lived in a peculiar age of transition, an age favourable to the production and flourishing of the humbug in religion, in politics, and in public and social life. A hard and coarse century had given way to a milder era. The middle-class was asserting itself, but as yet it lacked strength; it still had fears and forebodings; it looked for leaders; it was possessed, as Tennyson expressed it, of crude imaginings—

“The herd, wild beasts and feeble wings
That every sophister can lime.”

This was the opportunity of the self-seeker, who came to the fore with plausible speech and a pretence of disinterested motives. The religious ranter, the smug philanthropist, the mouthing patriot, the political charlatan, the pander, and the snob, were in abundant evidence; the proletariat with new-found independence and rights fell an easy victim

to quackery. Mr. Gregsbury, profuse in promise, insolent in non-performance, fooled the populace to the top of its bent; oily Chadbands and fanatical Melchizedek Howlers fooled credulous congregations; and bar-parlour orators fooled village communities; the People were tricked and duped at every turn. The wolf was abroad, and sheep's clothing was the fashion. Dickens decided to treat these ruthless raveners as the Carthaginians treated the lions, who terrified away their like as they howled during crucifixion.

The People
in Peril.

The masses were rising, and had at last shaken off their bondage; the great gulf between rich and poor was being bridged; Chartism was in the air; there were no distractions of war, and social reform was progressing. But though the "lower orders" could not be terrorized as of old, they could still be cajoled; their weaknesses and cupidity could be played upon; in their helplessness false leaders foisted themselves upon them with a chance of speedy and almost unques-

tioned acceptance—and so arose the whole tribe of humbugs, cunning rogues, sanctimonious apostles, and knavish leaders, who were intent upon their own gain while professing nothing but the advantage of others.

Dickens perceived what duty lay before him, and set whole-heartedly about it. Two courses were open: ridicule and scourging. ^{“Woe unto ye!”} He was a master of the weapons in each case, but he believed subtlety was best met with subtlety. “Never were greed and cunning in the world yet,” he said, “that did not overreach themselves,” and his task was to show the failure and the ignominy of the Snawleys, the Sim Tappertits, the Noah Claypoles, the Montague Tiggs, the Casbys, the Lammles, and all the sycophants, parasites, sneaks, spies, and shams who prey upon their fellow-men. The portraits of men of mean and toadying spirit, with contorted lips and shifty eyes, excite our derision; other pictures, drawn full-length and with every detail laid bare, excite a burning indignation, an angry revulsion — Pumblechook and Pecksniff,

Chadband and Bounderby, Honeythunder and Heep. The smaller rabble dwindle in the presence of these giant bladders, colossal in bulk, petty in soul; their sinister countenances displaying a concentration of chicanery and iniquity.

In the Dickens gallery every type is manifest. There is the hypocrite who grovels, and the hypocrite who stands erect; the hypocrite who shouts from the housetop, and the hypocrite who speaks with bated breath and whispering humbleness; the hypocrite who smirks ingratiatingly, and the hypocrite who frowns austere; the hypocrite who laughs and sings with affected good humour, and the hypocrite who weeps and moans in simulated distress. Unctuous or vulgar, moralizing or worldly, their aim is the same—destruction. And these were the foes whom Dickens fought. He fought for the sake of that which he loved so well, the “simple heart.”

The *Sketches by Boz* include a series of proofs of Dickens's determination to make

the humbug a target for his shafts of ridicule. Slight as the stories are they have significance; and though we are amused at the primitive wiles of Mr. Jennings Rudolph and Signor Billsmethi, though we wonder how any sane people could be deceived by Captain and Mrs. Waters, and though we have scant sympathy with the ladies who were so easily beguiled by the dapper assistant at Jones, Spruggins, and Smith's, of Tottenham Court Road;—we realize the growing and insistent purpose of the author, and are prepared for the elaborate plans which he was speedily to develop. Jingle and Trotter, too, are not far removed from crudeness, and such transparent impostors could never have deceived any but the amiable and unsuspecting Mr. Pickwick and his guileless companions. Yet we must not forget that even now a large proportion of the world is ready to accept explorers' tales of turtle-riding in Australia and vast achievements in the vicinity of the North Pole, though the evidence may be little more sub-

A Minor Group.

stantial and particular than that which Mr. Jingle offered of his cricketing exploits in the West Indies with sturdy Sir Thomas Blazo and the pathetic Quanko Samba.

It was in *Pickwick* that Dickens first lashed out against the pious fraud, in the person of the Rev. Mr. Stiggins. The actual portrait is worth contemplating, because an explanation of the author's object—
Religious Cant. which ought never to have been necessary—has been demanded. Stiggins, we are told, was “a prim-faced, red-nosed man, with a long thin countenance, and a semi-rattlesnake sort of eye—rather sharp but decidedly bad. His looks were starched, but his white handkerchief was not. A small tray of tea-things was arranged on the table, a plate of hot-buttered toast was gently simmering before the fire; . . . beside him stood a glass of reeking hot pineapple rum and water, with a slice of lemon in it; and every time the red-nosed man stopped to bring the round of toast to his eye, with the view of ascertaining how it got on, he imbibed a drop or two of

the hot pineapple rum and water." At a later period he preached in the Fleet on the vice of intoxication, "which he likened unto the filthy habits of swine, and to those poisonous and baleful drugs which, being chewed in the mouth, are said to filch away the memory. At this point of his discourse the reverend and red-nosed gentleman became singularly incoherent, and staggering to and fro in the excitement of his eloquence, was fain to catch at the back of a chair to preserve his perpendicular." Dickens objected to Stiggins, not because he imbibed pineapple rum, but because he affected to hate it.¹ The moral he had in view re-

¹ There is a curious little parallel to Dickens's Stiggins in Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon* :—"The Reverend Mr. Jowls, my mother's director, was the only person to whom the door of her habitation was opened; and he would take no denial. He mixed himself a glass of rum-punch, which he seemed in the habit of drinking at my good mother's charge, groaned aloud, and forthwith began reading me a lecture upon the sinfulness of my past courses . . . 'I would have had the gentleman avoid the drink,' said the clergyman." (Chap. xvi. *Barry Lyndon* was published in 1844, seven years after *Pickwick*.)

appeared many times in his works, just as the incidents were subsequently repeated in more skilful fashion.

“Mr. Stiggins,” he said, “did not desire his hearers to be upon their guard against those false prophets and wretched mockers of religion, who, without sense to expound its first doctrines, or hearts to feel its first principles, are more dangerous members of society than the common criminal; imposing, as they necessarily do, upon the weakest and worst-informed, casting scorn and contempt on what should be held most sacred, and bringing into partial disrepute large bodies of virtuous and well-conducted persons of many excellent sects and persuasions.”

This was nothing less than a Dickens manifesto against Cant using the garb of virtue to conceal its own profligacy. At a much later period in his life he reverted to the topic, and in an *Uncommercial Traveller* essay made a particularly effectual protest against the “slangs and twangs” of self-righteousness of those preachers who are full of “spiritual vanity” and needlessly

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hard in dealing with their "fellow-sinners." "Is it not enough," he asked, "to be fellow-creatures, born yesterday, suffering and striving to-day, dying to-morrow? By our common humanity—hear me!" But the narrow minds were continually putting Dickens on his defence. He attacked Stiggins; therefore he was insidiously attacking religion itself, Stiggins being a "Shepherd."

It is difficult to understand this class of obtuseness, but it is the worm that dieth not, and Dickens, in the Preface to *Pickwick* when re-published, set forth his perfectly supererogatory vindication thus:

"Lest there should be any well-intentioned persons who do not perceive the difference between religion and the cant of religion, piety and the pretence of piety, a humble reverence for the great truths of Scripture and an audacious and offensive obtrusion of its letter and not its spirit in the commonest dissensions and meanest affairs of life, to the extraordinary confusion of ignorant minds, let them understand that it is always the latter,

An
Explanation

and never the former, which is satirized here. Further, that the latter is satirized as being inconsistent with the former, impossible of union with it, and one of the most evil and mischievous falsehoods existent in society—whether it establish its head-quarters in Exeter Hall, or Ebenezer Chapel, or both. It is never out of season to protest against that coarse familiarity with sacred things which is busy on the lip, and idle in the heart; or against the confounding of Christianity with any class of persons who, in the words of Swift, have just enough religion to make them hate, and not enough to make them love, one another.”

Sanctimonious
Humbugs.

Chadband follows in due order of succession to Stiggins—the Reverend Mr. Chadband who excited a holy awe in women, who preached unworldliness and an almost unrealizable sanctity, and who looked well after his physical comforts and his worldly profit. The full-length picture represents one of the most earnest attempts to unmask the Pharisee—

“Mr. Chadband is a large yellow man, with a fat smile, and a general appearance

of having a good deal of train oil in his system. He moves softly and cumbrously, not unlike a bear who has been taught to walk upright. He is very much in a perspiration about the head, and never speaks without first putting up his great hand, as delivering a token to his hearers that he is going to edify them.

“‘My friends,’ says Mr. Chadband, ‘Peace be on this house! On the master thereof, on the mistress thereof, on the young maidens, and on the young men! My friends, why do I wish for peace? What *is* peace? Is it war? No. Is it strife? No. Is it lovely, and gentle, and beautiful, and pleasant, and serene, and joyful? O yes! Therefore, my friends, I wish for peace, upon you and upon yours.’”

He was interrupted in his discourse by the announcement of the prosaic fact that he had not sufficiently paid the cabman, who insisted on an extra eightpence. Mr. Chadband lifted up his hand.

“‘My friends,’ said he, ‘I remember a duty unfulfilled yesterday. It is right that I should be chastened in some penalty. I ought not to murmur. . . . Eightpence is not

much; it might justly have been one-and-fourpence; it might justly have been half-a-crown. O let us be joyful, joyful!"

It was the good man's habit to "keep a sort of debtor and creditor account in the smallest items, and to post it publicly on the most trivial occasions." When, in the midst of another elevating discourse, he was interrupted by a yawn, he turned the incident to good account and to his own advantage, by saying, while his persecuted chin folded itself into a fat smile: "My friends, it is right that I should be humbled, it is right that I should be tried, it is right that I should be mortified, it is right that I should be corrected. I stumbled, on Sabbath last, when I thought with pride of my three hours' improving. The account is now favourably balanced; my creditor has accepted a composition. O let us be joyful, joyful!"

Ridicule constitutes the most effectual of all forms of denunciation for this class of impostor. There is no need to cannonade

jelly-bags, or to bombard unctuousity. Sticks and stones would confer a glorification on the martyred Chadbands—but they explode with a pin-prick, and resolve themselves into their original grease.

The converse of Chadband, oleaginous and placidly self-contented, is the Rev. ^{Howling} ^{Dervishes} Luke Honeythunder, the belligerent Philanthropist—the man who walked in the middle of the road, shouldering the natives out of the way, and loudly developing a scheme he had for making a raid on the unemployed, clapping them into gaol, and forcing them, on pain of prompt extermination, to become philanthropists. He cried in effect—“Curse your souls and bodies, come here and be blessed”; he abased religion and killed the Gospel. His philanthropy, we are told, was of a gunpowdery sort that made it very much like animosity. You were to abolish military force by shooting all the officers; to abolish war by fighting all opponents; to abolish capital punishment by hanging all people of a contrary opinion;

Cant versus
Charity.

and to love your brother by calling him names and maligning him. Philanthropy was to be inculcated by passing resolutions expressing "indignant scorn and contempt, not unmixed with utter detestation and loathing abhorrence" of everybody and everything with which Mr. Honeythunder disagreed. He took the worst view of his fellow-men, finding them guilty of all sorts of desperate crimes without waiting for the shadow of evidence. In his correspondence he bade whole families to "stump up instantly, and be philanthropists, or go to the devil," and in all respects he was very much like a pugilist—except, as Dickens reminds us, pugilists don't hit a man when he is down, or kick him, or maul him behind his back without mercy. Moreover, the pugilists do not always employ such uncompromising and vehement maledictions.

Very gently, very beautifully, Dickens for a moment revealed his own feelings, lifted a curtain that we might discover the motive for uncloaking these wordy, shallow-

pated, mouthing preachers whose every deed falsified the religion they affected to expound, and the Master they pretended to serve. Honeythunder in his severe rectitude proved all men vile; Chadband in his clammy piety proved poor Jo to be an outcast, an unforgivable reprobate; and Dickens whispered tenderly—"It may be, Jo, that there is a history so interesting and affecting even to minds as near the brutes as thine, recording deeds done on this earth for common men, that if the Chadbands, removing their own persons from the light, would show it thee in simple reverence, would but leave it unimproved, would but regard it as being eloquent enough without their modest aid, it might hold thee . . . and thou wouldst learn from it yet."

Canting ministers and whining beggars are somewhat akin, and Dickens was equally hostile to both breeds. In a letter to Wilkie Collins he humorously related how he was beset in Paris by men who enclosed him their compositions "on tea paper with a limp

The Begging Trade.

cover," scrawled "Hommage à Charles Dickens, l'illustre Romancier," sent them to him in dirty envelopes, and waited for bounteous recognition. The letter-writing cadger was odious to him, and he has left us a grimly diverting account of the type who

"wants a greatcoat to go to India in, a pound to set him up in life for ever, a pair of boots to take him to the coast of China, or a hat to get him into a permanent situation under Government. . . . He has had two children who have never grown up; who have never had anything to cover them at night; who have been continually driving him mad by asking in vain for food; and who have never come out of fevers and measles. . . . What his brother has done to him would have broken anybody else's heart. His brother went into business with him and ran away with the money; his brother got him to be security for an immense sum of money and left him to pay it; his brother would have given him employment to the tune of hundreds a year if he would have consented to write letters on a Sunday. . . . His life presents a series of inconsistencies. Sometimes he has never written such a letter before. He blushes with shame. This is the

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first time; it shall be the last. Don't answer it; and let it be understood he will kill himself quietly. Sometimes he *has* written a few such letters. Then he encloses the answers, with an intimation that they are of inestimable value to him. . . .”

There is a hint of Montague Tigg in the begging-letter writer and persistent borrower when Dickens goes on to say—“Shall he tell me why he writes to me? Because he has no kind of claim upon me. He puts it on that ground plainly; and begs to ask for the loan (as I know human nature) of two sovereigns, to be repaid next Tuesday six weeks before twelve at noon.” “The poor,” wrote Dickens, anxious not to be misunderstood, and equally desirous of enforcing the true moral upon the public,—“the poor never write these letters. Nothing could be more unlike their habits. The writers are public robbers; and we who support them are parties to their depredations. They trade upon every circumstance within their knowledge that affects us, public or private, joyful or

Malingers

sorrowful; they pervert the lessons of our lives; they change what ought to be our strength and virtue into weakness, and encouragement of vice. There is a plain remedy, and it is in our own hands. We must resolvè, at any sacrifice of feeling, to be deaf to such appeals and crush the trade."

As for the "well-spoken young man," who has a flowing confidential tone, and speaks without punctuation, and begins by asking the time, and ends with an attempt to sell a tortoiseshell comb for the sake of a 'ouseless family awaiting with beating 'arts the return of a husband and father,—has he not been delineated with such graphic skill, that the wily pest on the highway need never again delude himself that he is unrecognized? He is as easily penetrated as that sturdier rogue, Wackford Squeers, telling the starveling boys to "subdue your appetites and you've conquered human natur'," the while he crams beef and hot-buttered toast into his maw. Bumble, too, with his strain of doleful piety, is gross enough; but Dickens was reserving

Glib
Charlatans.

his strength for greater efforts, and the turpitude of the hypocrite was to be displayed in all its detestable aspects in four characters who can never be released from their pillory of shame.

(b) *Portraits in Oils.*

We reach the large gallery where four full-length portraits are exhibited. We stand before unctuous iniquity represented by the master-hand in the determination to make each picture complete to the veriest detail. First, Josiah Bounderby. The catalogue describes him:

“A big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. A man made out of a coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him. A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up. A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start. A man who could never sufficiently

vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through the brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility."

Hear him speak. The invariable exordium is—

"I hadn't a shoe to my foot. As to a stocking, I didn't know such a thing by name. I passed the day in a ditch, and the night in a pigsty. That's the way I spent my tenth birthday. Not that a ditch was new to me, for I was born in a ditch."

Thus honest Bounderby, self-made man, hard-headed, progressive, plain dealer in fact and common-sense. Coleridge has told us in one of his most bitter and cynical poems that the devil's "darling sin" is

"Pride that apes humility";

and if that be a correct surmise a warm welcome awaits the tribe of Bounderby. His abasement was as big a sham as his personal history was a fable. He gloated on imaginary catastrophes in order to command undeserved laudation for his conquests. "I was born

Boastful
Humility,

with inflammation of the lungs," said he. "For years I was one of the most miserable little wretches ever seen. I was so sickly, that I was always moaning and groaning. I was so ragged and dirty that you wouldn't have touched me with a pair of tongs." The boaster of wretchedness of course becomes the apportioner of his own praise. "How I fought through it, *I* don't know," said Bounderby. "I was determined, I suppose. I have been a determined character all my life. Here I am, and nobody to thank for my being here, but myself."

The impostor does not mind who is cut or crushed under his triumphant chariot-wheels, so he proceeds to drive over prostrate bodies.

"My mother! Bolted ma'am. . . . She left me to my grandmother, and, according to the best of my remembrance, my grandmother was the wickedest and worst old woman that ever lived. If I got a little pair of shoes by chance, she would take 'em off and sell 'em for drink. Why, I have known that grandmother of mine lie in her bed and drink her fourteen glasses of liquor before breakfast. . . . She kept a chandler's shop,

and kept me in an egg-box. That was the cot of *my* infancy: an old egg-box. As soon as I was big enough to run away, of course I ran away. Then I became a young vagabond; and instead of one old woman knocking me about and starving me, everybody of all ages knocked me about and starved me. . . . I was à nuisance, an incumbrance, and a pest.’”

His pride, observes Dickens, in having at any time achieved such a great social distinction as to be a nuisance, an incumbrance, and a pest, was only to be satisfied by three sonorous repetitions of the boast. We pass to the apotheosis of this wormy wretch, who, as he said, “pulled through it, though nobody threw me out a rope,” and his stages of progress and glory were—“Vagabond, errand-boy, vagabond, labourer, porter, clerk, chief manager, small partner, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown. Those are the antecedents and the culmination.” He had probably told his circumstantial lie until he almost believed it; rank impostors impose not a little on themselves. Perchance when this boaster and blusterer at length came face

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to face with Truth in the form of a quiet little old lady, he was positively affrighted at the apparition. For a day came when the Bully of humility was pricked like a bubble and burst with a sudden shock, leaving only a little watery exudation to denote where he had enjoyed his inflated existence.

The companion portrait to Bounderby is that of Uncle Pumblechook, too much of a tom-fool and poltroon, however, to cause more than irritation. There is a self-satisfied placidity about his dull egotism which amuses rather than angers us. We hear him saying with solemn fervour—"Look at Pork, alone. There's a subject. If you want a subject, look at Pork!" He is the thorn in the side of little Pip so long as the lad is poor and oppressed; he is the amiable elephantine friend when Pip becomes rich and powerful; he is gracious and condescending among his equals and the oppressor of his inferiors; he is the injured innocent when all does not turn out so well as he expected. Always he is a humbug, preten-

The
Preposterous
Pumblechook.

tious and portentous, silly, exasperating, wooden-headed, more fool than knave, but quite capable of mischief. When Pip received money mysteriously from Miss Havisham it was Pumblechook who appeared to know all about it, to be partly responsible for it, and to know the proper disposal of it. When, later, Pip came into his whole fortune, Pumblechook was immensely to the fore. "To think," said Mr. Pumblechook, snorting admiration, "that *I* should have been the humble instrument of leading up to this, is a proud reward. . . . Do I," said Mr. Pumblechook, "see afore me, him as I ever sported with in his times of happy infancy? . . . Here is wine," said Mr. Pumblechook. "Let us drink. Thanks to fortun', and may she ever pick out her favourites with equal judgment . . . Ah, poultry, poultry," said Mr. Pumblechook, apostrophizing the fowl in the dish, "you little thought when you was a young fledgling, what was in store for you." Pip's ruin enabled Pumblechook to be more than equal to the great and solemn occasion :

“‘Young man, I am sorry to see you brought so low. But what else could be expected?’ He extended his hand with a magnificently forgiving air. ‘William,’ said Mr. Pumblechook to the waiter, ‘put a muffin on the table. And has it come to this? Has it come to this?’ Mr. Pumblechook poured out the tea with the air of a benefactor who was resolved to be true to the last. ‘William,’ said Mr. Pumblechook mournfully, ‘put the salt on. In happier times,’ addressing me, ‘I think you took sugar. And did you take milk? You did. Sugar and milk. William, bring a watercress.’

“‘Thank you,’ said I, shortly, ‘but I don’t eat watercress.’

“‘You don’t eat ’em,’ returned Mr. Pumblechook, sighing and nodding his head several times, as if he might have expected that, and as if abstinence from watercress were consistent with my downfall. ‘True. The simple fruits of the earth. No. You needn’t bring any, William. . . . Yet,’ said Mr. Pumblechook, turning to the landlord and waiter, and pointing me out at arm’s length, ‘this is him as I ever sported with in his days of happy infancy. Tell me not it cannot be; I tell you this is him.’ A low murmur from the two replied. The waiter appeared to be particularly affected. ‘This

is him,' said Pumblechook, 'as I have rode in my shay-cart. This is him as I have seen brought up by hand. This is him unto the sister of which I was uncle by marriage, as her name was Georgiana M'ria from her own mother, let him deny it if he can.'

"The waiter seemed convinced that I could not deny it, and that it gave the case a black look.

"'Young man,' said Pumblechook, 'here is Squires of the Boar present, known and respected in this town, and here is William, which his father's name was Potkins if I do not deceive myself.'

"'You do not, sir,' said William.

"'In their presence,' pursued Pumblechook, 'I will tell you what to say. Says you—"I have this day seen my earliest benefactor and the founder of my fortun's." Says you—"I have seen that man, and that man bears me no malice. But he knows my want of gratioode, my total deficiency of common human gratioode In my being brought low he saw the finger of Providence. He knowed that finger when he saw it, and he saw it plain. It pintoed out this writing—"Reward of ingratitoode to earliest benefactor and founder of fortun's.'" . . . Squires of the Boar, and William,' said Pumblechook, addressing the landlord and waiter, 'I have

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no objections to your mentioning either up town or down town, if such should be your wishes, that it was right to do it, kind to do it, benevolent to do it, and that I would do it again.' With those words the Impostor shook them by the hand, with an air, and left the house."

With the instinct of the true artist Dickens brought into sharp relief his diverse characters, and good and evil serve as foils. Each of the hypocrites, double-dealing and sinister, is contrasted with a nature of genuine truth and purity—Carker, with his cruel teeth, his black-hearted treachery, his cruel plots, against Captain Cuttle with his transparent simplicity; Pumblechook, with his low designs, against Joe Gargery with his self-abnegation; Pecksniff, most loathsome of parasites, against Tom Pinch of limpid and unsuspecting innocence; Bounderby, hard, pompous, and mendacious, against tender and sacrificing Stephen Blackpool; and Uriah Heep, a monstrous reptile with hidden fangs and claws, against a little band of

Guile and
Innocence
contrasted.

guileless single-minded creatures, Peggotty, Traddles, Micawber, and Agnes Wickfield. The juxtaposition of these characters, the guilty and the guileless, is deftly and dramatically contrived; contrast heightens effect; and the contaminated look the more evil by the side of the unstained. Never is this more apparent than in the case of the Pecksniffs, the most conscious and expert of all hypocrites, the traders in duplicity, the most cultivated of counterfeiting and dissembling ravagers. They mark the last stage in corruption and perfidy, the more repugnant in that it is a deliberate debasement, a planned prostitution of powers.

The Arch-Hypocrites.

Hypocrisy so infects the blood of the Pecksniffs that they are hypocrites to each other. They are arrayed in impeccable morality; they display nothing but good-humour, toleration, kindly service; but beneath their vesture lurks the most iniquitous of conceits, and their smiles are the false and slimy glitter which plays upon dangerous shoals.

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They affect humility because they are vain; they put on meekness because they are rapacious, sordid, and cruel; they pretend friendliness because they are essentially greedy, bitter, designing, viperish. Seth Pecksniff is a barbarian in frock-coat, ready with poison and spear. So virulent is his black blood that it has been transmitted to his progeny, women though they be.

Dickens sketched the Pecksniffs with unswerving hand. From the first strokes we recognize the mastery, the fullness, the precision of the depiction. We are bidden to note the youngest Miss Pecksniff upon the low stool at her father's feet, not by reason of her shortness, but because of her simplicity and innocence, her girlishness, her playfulness and wildness, her kittenish buoyancy; "sometimes she even wore a pinafore, so fresh was she and so full of childlike vivacity." Then we turn our regard on the elder Miss Pecksniff, with her fine strong sense and her mild yet not reproachful gravity. Between the two stands Mr. Peck-

Pecksniff the Destroyer.

sniff himself, "a moral man, a grave man, a man of noble sentiments and speech," "a most exemplary man, fuller of virtuous precept than a copybook." "His very throat was moral. You saw a good deal of it. You looked over a very low fence of white cravat, and there it lay, a valley between two jutting heights of collar, serene and whiskerless before you. It seemed to say, on the part of Mr. Pecksniff, 'There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen; all is peace, a holy calm pervades me.' So did his hair, just grizzled with an iron-grey, which was all brushed off his forehead, and stood bolt upright, or slightly drooped in kindred action with his heavy eyelids. So did his person, which was sleek though free from corpulency. So did his manner, which was soft and oily. In a word, even his plain black suit, and state of widower, and dangling double eye-glass, all tended to the same purpose, and cried aloud—'Behold the moral Pecksniff.'" If actual diamonds did not fall from his lips, as with the girl in the fairy tale, "they were the very

brightest paste, and shone prodigiously." By profession he was an architect, and though nothing was known of his architectural doings, "it was generally understood that his knowledge of the science was almost awful in its` profundity." Such is Pecksniff in outline.

The main idea in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is to trace the history of this prodigious living lie, this moral abortion, this rascal plumed as philanthropist. His drudge, Tom Pinch, is sent adrift by Pecksniff to gain his own ends; he ostracizes his kith and kin for the sake of gold; he forsakes his own daughters in their misery and distress. Nothing touches his savage nature so long as Self is served; and in his worst and most abject moments he is still sublimely moral, philosophizing, and unctuous. He abounds in tags and platitudes, and is always ready with a "soothing reflection." Conscience never twinges him; his spirit is never perturbed.

Dickens reveals the character of Pecksniff with shrewd touches. When he says, "Oh,

let us not be for ever calculating, devising, and plotting for the future," he eyes his daughters, "so jocosely, with a kind of saintly waggishness," that we perceive at once the real significance of the pious observation. When he expresses pain at Tom Pinch's conduct we are told he speaks "not severely—only virtuously"; and when Tom Pinch excuses himself, Mr. Pecksniff stops him with "a serene upraising of his hand." His self-possession never leaves him. If John Westlock assails him his "calmness is quite ethereal"; when others allow their passions head, Mr. Pecksniff is gentleness personified, as he lays his hand upon his breast and lets his eyelids droop. A "moral gulf" ever seems to lie between him and his fellow-creatures. Speak to him of money and he raises his eyes beseechingly to heaven, smites his forehead, and cries, "Oh, Mammon, Mammon!" until it seems sacrilege to approach the baleful subject again. With his raging and scheming relations around him he wears "an apostolic look,"

A Placid
Monster.

and his "unruffled smile proclaims that he is a messenger of peace—combining in himself all the mild qualities of the lamb with a considerable touch of the dove."

He received his guests, we are told, with eyes so overflowing and countenance so damp with gracious perspiration, that he may be said to have been in a kind of moist meekness. He was imperturbably forgiving and polite. "Don't be a hypocrite," said one of his outspoken relations. What was Mr. Pecksniff's soft answer to turn away wrath? "Charity, my dear," said he to his daughter, "when I take my chamber candlestick to-night, remind me to be more than usually particular in praying for Mr. Anthony Chuzzlewit: who has done me an injustice." His gratitude for small favours, or for no favours at all, was boundless. Once he was at a loss for a word—"The name of those fabulous animals (pagan, I regret to say) who used to sing in the water, has quite escaped me." "Swans," some one suggested. "No," said Mr. Pecksniff, "not swans. Very

like swans, too. Thank you." Some one propounded "Oysters." "No," said Mr. Pecksniff, with his own peculiar urbanity, "not oysters. But by no means unlike oysters; a very excellent idea; thank you, my dear sir, very much. Wait! Sirens!" All-things-to-all men, the model and master of the hypocrite's art—Pecksniff.

The Halo of
Martyrdom.

He becomes a colossal character as the story develops. Beneath his slimy servility we find the tyrant and taskmaster; the man who shrinks in holy alarm from money is the most sordid of rogues; the urbane friend is the most devastating of foes. He passes from comedy to tragedy—a rogue of a master, a heartless father, a swindler in business, a monster of self-seeking, false through and through, unredeemed, impenitent, the gangrene of hypocrisy destroying him body and soul. Nothing is too low for him to crush, nothing too exalted for him to topple down. His deceits are carried out in microscopic detail as well as on the magnificent scale. He is a humbug in his own little

room where, he says, he “reads when the family supposes he has retired to rest,” and where he keeps a table, lamp, sheets of paper, and a piece of indiarubber in case some architectural idea should come into his head at night, in which event he would instantly leap out of bed and fix it for ever. He is a humbug when he passes off as plans of his own the work of a pupil and blandly receives the plaudits of the multitude; he is a humbug when he sends blameless Tom Pinch away with an affectation of unspeakable injury; he is a humbug when he consents for money to turn Martin Chuzzlewit out of doors and then rebukes Mrs. Todgers for worshipping the Golden Calf. “‘Oh Calf, Calf!’ cried Mr. Pecksniff mournfully. ‘Oh Baal, Baal! Oh, my friend, Mrs. Todgers! To barter away that precious jewel, self-esteem, and cringe to any mortal creature—for eighteen shillings a week!’” And as he spoke his “whole figure teemed with a consciousness of the moral homily he had read.” “Eighteen shillings a week!”

echoes and comments Dickens. "Just, most just, thy censure, upright Pecksniff! Had it been for the sake of a ribbon, star, or garter; a sleeve of lawn, a great man's smile, a seat in parliament, a tap upon the shoulder from a courtly sword; a place, a party, or a thriving lie, or eighteen thousand pounds, or even eighteen hundred;—but to worship the Golden Calf for eighteen shillings a week! Oh pitiful, pitiful!"

Even in the last hour of doom Pecksniff is false. Justice itself can scarcely grapple with the supple rogue, and he passes from the stage still with a show of triumph, still creating an illusion that his is the glory of martyrdom and not the felon's shame.

Society's
Slave. The last wretch in this Malebolge, where he works out his doom amid execration, is one who excites deepest loathing, and yet I can spare him a thought of pity. Bounderby and Pecksniff were deliberate hypocrites, choosing the worse part, making themselves foul in flattery and fraud. Uriah Heep is an abomination, but he is a victim as well as a

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beast of prey. He has the sentiments and the mock humility of Blifil; but Blifil was malignant without just cause, whereas Heep is malignant under provocation. Society at its worst made Uriah Heep a villain. Society made him a reptile, and the reptile used its sting in revenge. Society robbed him of self-respect, and he retaliated by grasping more than his due. No sense of honour held him back, for Society had deprived him of a sense of honour. He had been subjugated and he was at war; his wounds rankled, and he wished to strike in stealth and fury at his torturers. Heep is a mass of corruptness and infamy; but he is the spoilt man of a world which keeps down the poor in their poverty and the wretched in their misery; the debased product of an age which insisted that the low-born should hold themselves in contempt and realize their inferiority. Spare a little pity for Uriah Heep, as Dante himself spared pity for the hated sinners in their smoking pits.

Society's
Victim.

All the signs of pestilence are upon Uriah

Heep : he is repugnant, with his cadaverous features, his red hair, his lank skeleton hand, his cold and clammy nature. There is something of the fungus about him, as if he were somehow a morbid growth out of the dark and rotting churchyard mould in which his father lay. ("He was a sexton. He is a partaker of glory at present, Master Copperfield. But we have much to be thankful for.") He strikes us with chill, fills us with nausea. But—pity him.

A Beast at bay.

Uriah Heep is sheerly an Ishmael, with his hand against every man; he is unforgiving, inexorable. He has the abiding mortification of being downtrodden. He will not fight openly—stealth and darkness are his weapons. The thin malignant blood of the servile mother is in his veins, and has turned to bitterness. Uriah Heep cloaks the fiercest determination beneath his humility; he wallows in slime like the unclean thing he is; but he has brains, audacity, ambition—and woe to those who stand in his way. To worm out a secret from young Copperfield,

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to get the mastery of foolish Mr. Wickfield, and to tyrannize over Micawber, are but stages in logical sequence in his career. He comes near a great victory; it is only the very heroism of his plots which proves his undoing, and brings him to earth with a crash. Uriah Heep's policy is purely destructive, and the end is to be his own aggrandizement—victory in love, victory in business, victory over all the fellow-creatures who, as he argues, would have kept him down. Tornadoes of revenge seethe beneath his smooth surface.

From lickspittle to tyrant is easy, natural. "Father and me," said Uriah, "was both brought up at a foundation school for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public sort of charitable establishment. They taught us a deal of umbleness. . . . We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters! Father

**Grovelling and
Poisonous.**

got the monitor-medal by being umble. So did I. Father got made a sexton by being umble. He had the character among the gentlefolks of being such a well-behaved man, that they were determined to bring him in. 'Be umble, Uriah,' says father to me, 'and you'll get on.' . . . And really, it ain't done bad."

Why Heep is pitiable.

"I had seen the harvest," said David Copperfield—that blasted harvest of rapine, war, and vengeance, which makes us abhor the name and deeds of Uriah Heep—"but," he added, "I had never thought of the seed." The seed had germinated in soil all too corrupt, but the wrong had originated in Society, not in the man. Foul as his soul might be, he was the injured party. Let him descend to his sulphur—but pity him. Heep is the typical outcome of a vicious system. He is the oppressed person chafed by his chains; he is the thrall who intends to throttle his master; he is the Sans-Culotte who brings in revolution; he is the cringing serf who one day ceases to whine and whisper

and breaks into curses and carmagnoles. "I am very umble to the present moment, but I've got a little power," said he, as he began to see the means of "recompensing himself." He nursed his grievance, he cherished his revenge; but can we not forgive something to the wounded beast who fixes his teeth in the flesh of his tormentors? In adjudging Heep, dastard and villain, let us in justice remember that he was provoked. When we condemn him let us also not forget to condemn Society which makes such monsters possible. Detestable as Uriah Heep is, he is to be mourned as well as hated; mean, crafty, malicious, as he glowers out of his frame, he is the picture of a base revenger, but with this provocation—he was born to subjection and repression, in itself a mortal injury. Uriah Heep is the biggest rogue, the most repugnant hypocrite in the whole big group, and yet I find an excuse for him which I cannot find for Chadband, or Bounderby, or Pecksniff. The excuse, however, does not entitle him to much mercy, still less to forgiveness. The

arch-intriguer, the assailant of innocence, the wrecker of homes, ever a miscreant and traitor, goes from depth to depth of depravity, in the descent becoming more malodorous and inhuman. Cheat and criminal, alternately cringing and bullying, infamous and unrepentant, he passes to a doom which, despite its degradation, we feel is inadequate and over-lenient. There was one moment only when he turned craven—that moment when all his high-built hopes were toppled to earth by Micawber's exposure; then the cur in him became manifest; he could still snarl, but his dastardly nature showed through his sullenness and mortification. He found, in his own phrase, that "umbleness won't go down," the apeing humbleness which is but a veil for virulence and vengeance.

As we turn from this last portrait of knavish hypocrisy we realize to the full the capacity and the deadly earnestness of the artist who produced this gallery of baleful exposures, always with one righteous purpose in view. It was a terrible but a necessary task. We turn

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from the awesome scenes moved, reflective; we are glad to depart, but the meaning remains and the lesson is clear. Only a man with a solemn object and with the profoundest sense of duty and responsibility would have devoted his power to such exposure and warning.

Dickens's whole-hearted vigour in dealing with every form of cant and imposture is the best testimony to his own love of sincerity and righteousness. He wanted national life and the national race to be moral and true. If the allusion is not irreverent, I will say that his unremitting attempt to purge the community of its Pecksniffs, Chadbands, and Heeps reminds us of nothing more forcibly than a certain grand episode of two thousand years ago when there was a driving forth of hypocrites from the Temple by One who wielded the scourge once only, and uttered once only those terrible words: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees." That was a moment of sublime and transcendent wrath.

Dickens was following that great mandate, that Divine example. He did it for

humanity's sake; he did it for the sake of his nation; he did it for the sake of Christianity. A scourge for the false prophets, the whitened sepulchres, the street-corner posturers, the polluters of life, the destroyers of faith—a lash to lacerate their unclean bodies, a barb to rankle in their darkened souls. No cant, but confidence; no shams, but sincerity; no impostures, but faith; no mockery with false gods, but worship of the True God: that was his creed—the creed that he has left for the contemplation, the admiration, and the adoption of his fellow-men.

CONCLUSION

HIS VISION OF ENGLAND

“I WANT at all times, in full sincerity,” said Dickens in the course of an address, “to do my duty to my countrymen.” In another speech he explained that he had felt “an earnest and humble desire to increase the stock of harmless cheerfulness.” “I felt,” Guiding Principles he continued, “that the world was not to be utterly despised. I was anxious to find in evil things that soul of goodness which the Creator has put in them. I was anxious to show that Virtue may be found in the byways of the world, and that it is not incompatible with poverty, and even with rags.” “I travel for the great House of Human Interest Brothers,” he said in his capacity of Uncommercial Traveller, “and have rather a large connexion in the Fancy Goods way.” As an editor he avowed his main object was to show that in all familiar things, even those repel-

lent on the surface, there was Romance, if we but troubled to seek it out; and "to teach the hardest workers at this whirling wheel of toil that their lot is not necessarily a moody, brutal fact, excluded from the sympathies and graces of imagination; to bring the greater and the less together upon that wide field, and mutually dispose them to a better acquaintance and understanding."

Regeneration.

He was willing to keep aloof from the tract mark of morality. He was not willing to frown on honest mirth and innocent laughter. His conscious purpose was to knit in bonds of sympathy the classes which had stood apart, mistrustful of each other, nursing feuds and grievances, hostile and resentful. He found an ugly, gloomy England with an atmosphere of poverty, hunger, and ignorant desperation, and he hated the "utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, commissioners of facts, genteel and used-up infidels, and gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds." With infinite pity he saw crushed manhood, drudging womanhood,

blighted childhood; with infinite contempt he beheld self-satisfied plutocracy and insolent officialdom. And in the darkness he dreamed. His dream was of a regenerated England. Regenerated—stronger, more secure, happier, more content. This was the vision of the future. He sought to make the vision real, and to bring the future near. He was not pursuing rainbow gold which ever recedes as the seeker advances.

To many of the onlookers it must have seemed a wild and futile enterprise. Everything was so settled, so ordained, in this scepter'd isle, this other Eden, demi-paradise, this precious stone set in the silver sea—that to doubt was treason, and to complain was godless heresy. The schools taught the labourer's child to be thankful for his lot and to be contented with his station; the pulpiters preached a smug optimism for the special benefit of the squirearchy. If a peasant dared to aspire to better things he was a dangerous demagogue; if he spoke of change he was a revolutionist and the enemy

"Putting
Down."

of Church and State; if he lifted a hand for reform he was Jack Cade, or, what was even worse, Jack Wilkes. The seditious multitude had to be checked. And, as Alderman Cute remarked, everything could be Put Down "if you only knew the way to set about it," from marriage to starvation, from poverty to death." In particular all ambition could be Put Down. "It was so Ordained. Such was the dispensation of an all-wise Providence."

To fight against all this was to fight against the most powerful massed forces of the age. Birth, privilege, wealth, and place were all leagued against the foe of order and the stirrer-up of strife who would not acquiesce in things as they were. To be on the side of redress was not only iniquitous, violent, irreligious, and radical—it was ungentlemanly. In order to be "gentlemanly," therefore, it was best to close the eyes to slum-centres of disease and crime, to close the ears to the moans of the debtor and the pauper, and to close the mind to all thoughts of bad laws,

"The
Gentlemanly
Interest."

vicious customs, tolerated abuses, and human wrongs. For those who refused to see, and hear, and think, nothing of the sort existed. They were a mirage of the distraught brain; to admit their reality was a sure proof of madness. The gentlemen of England remained calm. Only vulgar fanatics fumed and raved. Everything was for the best, nothing new was needed, reform was subversive, and if any one happened to suffer it was his own fault. Sir Barnet Skettles, Sir Joseph Bowley, the nobility, the Aldermen, the Bishops, and the Judges, said so with amazing unanimity.

Into this placid and repressed age Charles Dickens was flung. He came, not with Puritan primness, not with Covenanting blows, but with bright eyes and pleasant laughter. None suspected that this man of mirth was the strictest of censors; none imagined that his gambols were a plan of campaign; none perceived that the pen with which his facile fingers played had a point more sharp and penetrating than Ithuriel's

Wisdom in
Motley.

spear. He was described as the "new humorist"; he was duly "quizzed," and was thought to be a clever clown; and when he cracked his whip the gallant onlookers grinned, though it happened, quite accidentally, that the lash had a teasing habit of cutting across their flaccid faces. For he was only the jester, with japes and jollity, and the gentlemen of England split their sides at his Pickwick and Weller. But, when they were won to his side, held by his art, gathered in huge concourse, the jester revealed himself as knight-errant, girt for the tourney, ready for as sublime a Quest as the Holy Grail. Knight-errant he remained, the gayest in apparel, the most inflexible in purpose, and not the least victorious in achievement. His sole inspiration was the Good of Humanity. His message was Hope and Cheerfulness. His object was a Better England.

Soldier, not
Scientist.

Once more it should be said that critic, reformer, patriot as he was, it does not necessarily follow that he had a precise science to expound, or that he fully understood every

phase of the subject wherein he saw there was need of redress. He was rather the exposé of evils than the mender; he indicated where faults lay, and he reproached those who were responsible; he marked the course of a disease but did not offer himself as the physician who could cure it. He was humanitarian by temperament, and perhaps he possessed more pity than practical politics. But that is not to his discredit. We must have the preacher to exhort as well as the practitioner to prescribe. Dickens supplied inspiration—that was no mean part of his mission. He had a positive instinct for the detection of things amiss; he was combative, and did not confine himself to one species of abuse or one class of ills—wherever there were sores to be healed, oppression to be resisted, follies to be whipped, negligence to be overcome, and suffering to be alleviated, there was Dickens to point out the duty—and thanks to his leadership, the duty was often undertaken. His moral creed, he had publicly declared, was to diffuse faith in the

existence of beautiful things, to prove that we have our sympathies, hopes, and energies in trust for the many and not for the few, and to hold in contempt all meanness, falsehood, cruelty, and oppression, of every grade and kind; "for above that," he added, "nothing is high because it is in a high place, and nothing is low because it is in a low one."

The Golden Rule. He touched life at many points. He had strong convictions, he had a strain of obstinacy, he was actively aggressive, and his animosities were as strong as his likings. What he admired he wished to see adopted; what he detested he wished to crush. "Love as I love, and hate as I hate," practically became his counsel, if not his command; for he had no misgivings as to his own unerring instinct. His method was to impress and fortify by examples; he exalted Virtue, though in rags, and Heroism "done every day in nooks and corners, and in little households, and in men's and women's hearts"; he execrated cant and insincerity, and refused to palter with sin under any disguise; he

placed foremost the sound spirit and the heart of gold; he sifted out the real gentleman from false gentility; he preached purity and unselfishness; and he crowned Human Service. There is perhaps nothing brilliant in this, and certainly there is nothing grandiloquent. His favourite maxims were of the copy-book order. We cannot make a Calendar of his "great thoughts." There is no subtlety in his moral code. He has no complex "isms" to offer and formulate. He preached no new religion—the Old Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount sufficed. His was a simple wisdom, but there is none more wholesome or more sublime.

To be true, to rise above paltry issues, to labour for great ends, to do appointed duties, to love one's neighbour, to minister to the weak, to raise the fallen:—how primitive it all is! But Dickens leaves us with a perfect understanding, an unmistakable realization, that life, with all its pleasure and suffering, its mirth and tears, its ordeals and triumphs, is for sacred use, deep responsibilities, and

unbroken progress towards a higher plane. Lux in tenebræ. Yet the ugly, gloomy period in which he wrought and taught was one which made the comprehension of his message extremely difficult, and many a time the reformer, almost alone, must have felt a chill in his soul, and have likened himself to the

“Pale Master on his spar-strewn deck,
With anguish'd face and flying hair
Grasping the rudder hard,
Still bent to make some port he knows not where,
Still standing for some false impossible shore.”

But in darkness, in storm, in the thick of conflict, that vision of a Happier, Better, Regenerated England never receded; never lost its gleam, never vanished in immeasurable distance.

Only a writer of stories, only a dealer in romance! But Charles Dickens was none the less a vital influence, a moulder of character, an ethical teacher, a force in the State, and a missionary in the highest, widest, truest sense, because he swayed our emotions through the medium of fiction; his gospel

was none the less sacred because it was lit with humour as well as sprinkled with tears; and his power will be none the less permanent because it is blent with sweet fancies and is radiant with glamour. He waved the enchanter's wand, and the glorious ideals were conjured into view.

His novels manifested a unity of design. Through each ran a "Cause," a motive, like a vein of gold. His fairy-tales became parables. His sketches were propaganda. His whole works are welded into one vast, strong, resolute purpose—the advance of man. Each New Year was to register a step onward. Each Old Year was to see retrograde customs go. He appealed to the young generation, and left his inspiring message for the coming times.

We hear of a Pickwickian England with its amiable follies and its blithesome adventures, but a Pickwickian England is degeneration. The ideal is a Dickensian England Ideal England animated by the Dickens spirit—an England preserving whatever is excellent in precedent,

but welcoming and adopting new ideas of progress and enlightenment, an England no longer the slave of tradition, an England of good motherhood and good fatherhood and happy child-life, an England of true manhood and true womanhood, an England of honest hearts, an England of fewer social barriers, an England of industrial earnestness and moral aspiration, an England of human federation and brotherhood. It is yet a vision, but it is not beyond attainment. Party politics and platitudes may not make it possible; it is to the prophets and poets we must look. The England yet to be will be fashioned by the dreamers rather than the statesmen.

To this ideal Dickens devoted himself; for the "Cause" he wrought and sacrificed. He so charms us that we may forget the strenuous toil in which he engaged. We make scant allowance for pleasures forsaken that duty might be done and the mission fulfilled. It is true he was happy in his labours, and that therefore his life of labour

was happy; it was a full life, a joyous life, and a life of much success. But his triumph in the one great Cause was only made possible by a certain self-abnegation—

“He who hath watch’d, not shar’d, the strife,
Knows how the day hath gone;
He only lives with the world’s life
Who hath renounc’d his own.”

What Arnold said of Wordsworth and Goethe could be as truly said of Dickens; though we are so apt to associate him with the very gaiety which he created, that we lose sight of the rigour and discipline to which he subjected himself.

For a man of his ardent temperament there was much to do. He preached discontent, and he instigated revolt. No half-measures would placate him. His only terms were—
False Gods
overthrown.
as when he rose in wrath against the Circumlocution Office—“Sweep the unclean thing away.” The reform was to be thorough and unequivocal, and he believed it could only come through the millions it was to save, and not through the few who gave it grudgingly

and piecemeal. "My faith in the people who govern is infinitesimal. My faith in the people governed is illimitable." He was a man in righteous anger, for he saw devastating evils around him and false gods openly worshipped. Like Elijah he cried for fire from heaven to consume the corruption and to testify to the true faith. He used every gift with which he had been endowed to secure his end. By his humour he made his fellow-men laugh at their own follies and become their own efficient censors. By his pathos he worked upon their deepest emotions and aroused an understanding of their urgent and insurgent needs. By his wrath he stirred up a hot indignation against injury and ill, and inflamed the passion for redress. And by his inspiration he taught that a seeming miracle was not beyond human effort, if only faith were established, and with it came hope and constancy.

This was his work for England. This was his mission. Rich in gifts he came, eager in service. A century has gone, but his legacy

remains. His message is in our hearts; the breath of his inspiration kindles our spirits. “The Immortal Memory.”

The labours of the pioneer await completion, and the ideal set in splendour before human eyes is yet to be reached. Dickens gave the force of mandates to his counsel, and he impresses us with a solemn sense of duty.

His memory! It is abiding, potent; a treasured possession that Time consecrates, that no conquest can make us yield, that no change can displace from that supremacy which a people's love has assigned it. His name glows with increasing lustre, for clearer understanding of his genius, deeper appreciation of his purpose, and livelier gratitude for his honourable campaign in humanity's cause, serve to feed the flame which keeps it in perpetual light.

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[*Author's Note.*—As the principal subjects are indicated in the margin of each page, it has not been thought necessary to include them in this Index. The names of the characters (many of which are only referred to allusively) are here given; and in order to facilitate further reference, if necessary, the volumes in which they appear are also specified, with the dates of publication. It is hoped in this way that every assistance has been afforded the reader to trace the course of the arguments, and to ascertain the data on which they are founded.]

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